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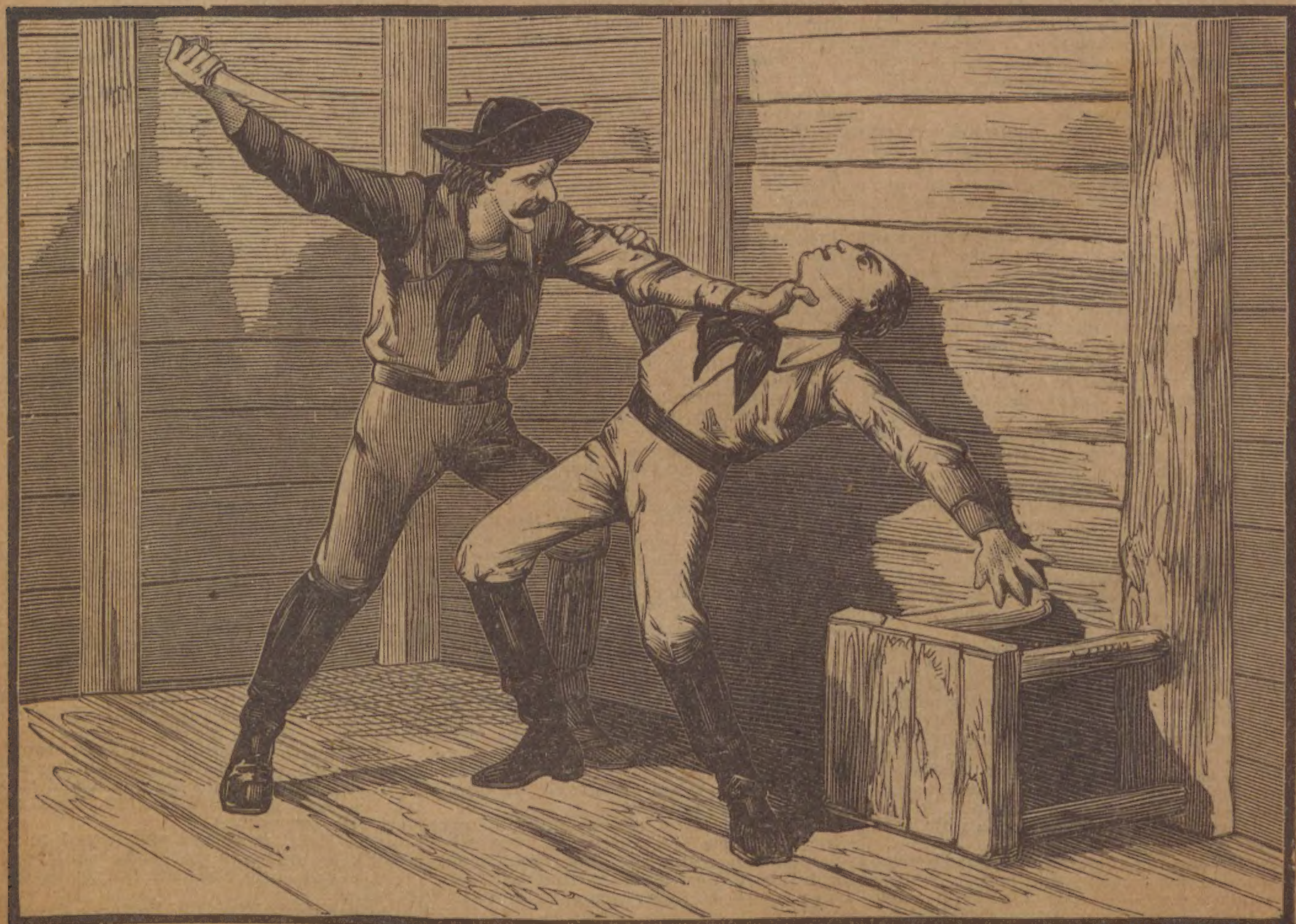
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THE GAME COCK OF DEADWOOD.

A STORY OF THE WILD NORTHWEST.

By GEORGE G. SMALL.



"Love is dead, but revenge is sweet." "But dead fools tell no tales!" said he, striking her quickly with a dagger. "Oh! murderer to the last!" cried she, falling to the floor.

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The Game Cock of Deadwood.

A STORY OF THE WILD NORTHWEST.

By GEORGE G. SMALL,

Author of "The Ocean Wolf," "Young Capt. Perry, the Hero of 1812," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT DAY FOR DEADWOOD.

YANKTON was the principal town in Dakota Territory, but Deadwood is without doubt the liveliest, and has been so ever since the first company of miners made camp there only a few years ago.

It is little more than a mining camp now, but if there is a place in the United States that is outside of law and civilization it is this same Deadwood in the Black Hills of Dakota.

Here are gathered the wildest, roughest and most adventurous characters to be found anywhere, although it is but little different from what mining towns were in the early days of Colorado and California, and probably never worse than many other mining towns in the far West.

The discovery of gold in large quantities is sure to bring together a rough and ready lot of adventurers from all parts of the world, and of course for a long time there can be but little law or order, and what society there is must naturally be of the roughest kind, while the bowie-knife and revolver are arbitrators and ready conclusions.

Less than ten years ago Deadwood was but little more than a nest of shanties and ranches, but of course the inevitable tavern was among the first buildings to go up, for a mining town without a tavern would be just nothing at all.

Old Yank Butts, as they called him, was the first to open a tavern there, the Bed Rock, and he and his wife at once became popular and important people. Both of them were fat, good-natured folks, and it is no wonder that the miners regarded them with favor.

In those days, without railroad communication, everything had to be transported by wagon and stage, and in a short time after the first discovery of gold, there was a large business doing on wheels between Deadwood and other places, although for a long time the Bed Rock tavern was the chief depot and hailing point in the camp.

Of course but a very few women, and those of the rougher, lower grade, found their way out there during the first five years, and the miners and adventurers were all the worse for a lack of female society. Gambling, fighting, stag dances and heavy drinking were about all the amusements to be found there, and these were indulged in with blood-curdling zest sometimes.

Among the first to establish a claim there was a hale, hearty, handsome, adventurous young fellow by the name of Dick Trigger. He was a general favorite among the miners, always ready for a lark or a fight, brave as a lion, quick as a cat, handsome and frank. Indeed, it was not long before he became known as the Game Cock of Deadwood. Everybody liked him, but few cared to argue with him with revolvers, a weapon he was proficient in the use of, and not a whit loath to use when occasion required.

At the opening of our story, he had become celebrated for participating in two or three most desperate fights, out of which he came smiling and victorious; and yet it was known that he never picked a quarrel or went back on a friend.

But just now, at the opening, we have to deal with something entirely different.

Deadwood had become quite a place, and there were at least a thousand miners located in the Black Hills and their neighborhood, and of course Deadwood was the grand center, with "Bed Rock" tavern as the point of interest.

But the fat, good-natured landlord had made an announcement that set the miners who patronized him all agog and full of excitement, it being no less than the news that his niece, Julia Barmore, one of the handsomest girls in New York, was on the point of paying them a visit.

The idea of a handsome, twenty-years-old girl from New York, undoubtedly stylish and tony, coming out into that far-away place to make a visit, was enough to set those miners crazy, almost; and the result was that they all appeared at the Bed Rock, on the day of her expected arrival, clean shaved and dressed in their best.

Not one of them would really admit to the other what he was there for, in his Sunday toggery, but it was fun to hear their excuses.

The stage from Pierre City was expected within an hour, and all was bustle and confusion about the little tavern. Landlord and landlady were busy attending upon guests, and the miners, in their holiday attire, were putting away large quantities of cheap whisky.

Dick Trigger was there, as also his partner in the claim they had staked out, a young fellow by the name of Joe Cranston. Joe had all the appearance of a boy—one of those fellows you could not even guess the age of; but Dick had found him when he first came to Deadwood, and had taken a fancy to him, so much so that he took him into partnership with him on his claim; and, although there was an air of mystery about him, he was ready at any time to trust him to any extent, and even lay down his own life for him.

Never was there greater difference between partners, and the other miners remarked it.

Dick was a big, brave, rollicking sort of a fellow, as before described, while Joe was almost as modest as a girl, but earnest at business, and one of the best ranch-keepers that Dick had ever encountered.

At this time they had been together on their claim almost a year, and it had turned out well; so well, indeed, that they were considered the heaviest-handed miners in the Black Hills; but on this great and important occasion they had both left their camp to come to Deadwood to witness the arrival of the New York beauty, although he probably would not have come had Dick not insisted upon it.

"Why, pard, you've got just as much right to see ther gal as any on us has," was Dick's argument, "an' who knows but she might drop on you as the finest, arter all? Hang me, if I don't think she will go dead-gone on you, anyhow! Yer a nice-lookin' chap, an' she may pan on you fust."

The greetings between the miners, many of whom had come long distances, were full of fun, and well-frosted with ingenious excuses for being in Deadwood at that particular time; but Dick Trigger was open and above board.

"Wall, maybe you chaps come in for oats an' provender for your mules. Maybe yer only just happened in—maybe ye come in ter buy grub or cartridges, as yer say, but I come

in—yes, me an' my young pard, ter see this new gal, this niece of old Yank Butts," said he, as a crowd of them stood before the bar.

"Dick, yer squar," said some one.

"Squar! Why, what's the use of gettin' behind trees and boulders? We haven't seen a gal from the States in a long time an' we all feel anxious. Ther last one I seen war down in Boulder, Colorado. She war a plump, golden-ha'ed angel, but a lawyer gobbled her up, an' left me an' some other chaps out in the cold. Bet that's what we're all here for, an' what's ther use of skulkin'? We want ter see that yer gal from New York."

"That's so," was the general response.

"In course it is, an' it's only human natur'. What's yer weakness, boys?"

This was an invitation to drink, and never was there a miner known to slight such a thing. Once more did they sample the crude spirits of old Yank Butts, and again the crowd was happy.

But before they had a chance fairly to get outside of the poison, the cry went up that the stage was coming, and a wild rush was made for the front of the tavern.

Yes, the stage was coming, and the miners ranged themselves about the road and in front of the place, singly and in effective groups.

The arrival of a stage in Deadwood at this time was an event, but now that a beautiful New York girl was expected—this made the occasion of the holiday which they were celebrating.

With several wild but artistic flourishes of his loud-snapped whip, Punch Dawson, the stage-driver, swept up in front of the tavern and then reined in his four horses with a loud and prolonged "whoa," presenting a stage full of passengers.

Everybody shouted: "Hello, Punch!" and he in turn replied freely to the salutations, while Landlord Butts and his wife rushed to open the door of the stage-coach.

Several rough-looking strangers got out, together with one or two with whom many were acquainted, and then a handsome, stylish young lady, about twenty years of age, sprang from the door with a glad shout, plump into the landlord's arms.

"Oh!" came from fifty throats, and at least a hundred owners of throats would have given their mining claims to change place with Butts.

"Julia!"

"Uncle Tom! Aunt Huldah!" exclaimed the girl in a voice that was perfectly bell-like in its tones, and then there was hugging and kissing as a natural consequence.

"Yum, yum, yum!" was heard all along the line, as the miners smacked their lips and poked each other in the ribs.

"Three cheers for the New York beauty!" cried Dick Trigger, as the girl and her relations started to go into the house, and those cheers were given with a heartiness that made the echoes ring.

Julia Barmore turned and bowed to the crowd, bestowing a ravishing smile upon Dick as she did so, and then the cheers were repeated.

Repeated by all but Bill Barton, a fighting, gambling desperado, who prided himself on his good looks, and had come there calculating to captivate the much talked of beauty, for when he saw her smile on Dick, and the

evident pleasure which he manifested at receiving it, his jealousy was aroused, and he instantly resolved on picking a quarrel with him.

Comments were freely indulged in by the crowd regarding the handsome stranger, and Dick was congratulated on the mash he had made on the first attempt.

A rush was made for the bar-room, and her health was drank dozens of times by the enthusiastic miners, many of whom had not seen a white girl in years.

Finally Landlord Butts took some of his particular friends into the reception-room and gave them introductions to his niece. Dick Trigger was among the first, of course, and recognizing him as the man who had proposed the cheer of welcome for her, she was most smiling and gracious, even awaking envy in the hearts of his companions and friends.

But Joe Cranston kept himself entirely aloof, and was noticed to be watching Bill Barton with a peculiar expression on his face, sometimes seeming to be in sorrow and then in anger, although he was so much excited that he did not notice that he was being watched.

Joe overheard him tell one of his gambler friends that he would have the girl Julia or lose his life for her; and that if Dick Trigger objected, he would kill him.

Finally Dick, in his enthusiasm, remembering that his partner, Joe, had not been presented to the new arrival, went and, in spite of his protests, pulled him into the room and introduced him.

"This yar's my pard, this young feller is, Miss Barmore. He's a good one all ther time, but he's as bashful-like as a gal," said he.

"I am pleased to know you, Miss Barmore," said Joe, bowing politely.

"Thank you. My welcome here has certainly been very cordial," replied Julia.

"Well, you see there are very few women out in these wilds—none, in fact, but your aunt—and the miners are naturally very enthusiastic over the arrival of the first one. Dick, can I speak with you a moment?" he asked, aside.

"Why, in course, pard. What is it?" he asked, as they retired to a corner of the room and gave the others a chance to converse with Julia, whose eyes followed Joe's movements intently.

"Where have I seen that face?" she mused.

"Pard, look out for Bill Barton."

"What!" exclaimed Dick, and then Joe quietly told him what he had overheard.

"Oh, that's his little game, is it?"

"Evidently. So be on your guard."

"Wall, I guess I most generally am, pard. So he's bound to stake a claim on that yar gal, hey?" he mused, glancing towards her.

"Yes; but do not kill him, Dick," said Joe, with so much earnestness that Dick looked at him in surprise.

"What, not if he tries to get ther bulge on me? What's the matter with you, pard?"

"Of course I want you to protect yourself, Dick; but please avoid a quarrel with him for my sake, won't you?"

"Joe Cranston, are yer getting off yer nut?" asked Dick, looking at him in still greater amazement. "Are yer going back on me, pard?—no, no; I take that back, Joe, for I know yer wouldn't do that yar. But, tell me, what do you care for that murderin' gambler, who ought ter have been treed long ago?"

"Don't ask me, Dick."

"What!"

"Well, I will tell you this much: I know Bill Barton well."

"Yer dol an' are yer 'fraid on him?"

"No, no, not that; but I know a girl East that loves him."

"Oh, yer do, hey? Well, she can't be payin' rock if she loves that yer rascal. Why, he isn't worth a coyote's love. Didn't he ruin a gal down in Yankton, an' drive her ter suicide? Didn't he marry a gal in Sioux City, steal all her dust, and then dust out?"

"Is that possible, Dick?" asked Joe, looking at him in a wild, strange way.

"In course it is. Don't I know him? Bet yer share of ther pile, pard, that I do. No, Joe, I won't let up on him on that account if he tries ter get ther bulge on me."

Joe remained silent, and finally left the room without bowing to Miss Barmore; and Dick watched him wonderingly.

"What in thunder's ther matter with Joe, anyhow?" he mused. "He's a queer cuss, anyhow, but he's a good un," he added, and

then joined in the throng that was still gathered around Julia Barmore.

Meantime, one of the strangers who had come in the last stage took the first opportunity he could get in the crowd and excitement to approach Barton.

"Bill!" said he, half aside.

"Well?" and he turned to the speaker.

"Don't you know me?"

Barton took a closer look at him.

"Yes. Mike Muggins."

"Correct."

"What brings you here in this disguise?"

"I thort as how I'd come up har and tell yer that somebody's squealed," said he.

"Squealed! On what?"

"That stage robbery of last May, down in Buffalo Gap."

"The deuce you say?"

"Yes, an' the officers is arter yer."

"Is that so?"

"I'm sartin on it, an' I'm purty sure that there's a government detective here in these Black Hills a-lookin' for yer."

"Do you think so, Mike? What makes you?" asked Barton, looking suspiciously around.

"An' if I'm not mistaken, he was on board the stage with me this trip."

"Point him out!"

"I don't see him here now. I was trying ter find yer, an' while doin' so he slid somewhere out of sight. So look out. I come up here just ter put yer on yer guard an' take ther next stage back ter Yankton."

"Where are the other members of the gang?" asked Barton, after a moment's pause.

"Scattered. Bill Bartlett's in Denver, I believe. 'Salt Sam,' he's gone ter 'Frisco, an' Knock-kneed Jed he's skipped East."

"Leaving only you and I of the gang?"

"That's all. An' we must stick ter each other, Bill, for I've got a good claim down here an' don't want ter be snaked off it."

"All right, old pard. It's a cold day when Bill Barton's left. I'm going to stay right here in Deadwood until I make a few points, and don't you forget it."

He turned as he said this and found himself standing face to face with Dick Trigger.

CHAPTER II.

A DUEL AT THE MUZZLE'S MOUTH.

Two mortal enemies face to face!

Bill Barton pounced upon Dick Trigger, who did not appear to notice him.

Side by side at a public bar!

Each hating the other, and each knowing the other only too well.

Joe Cranston was watching it all.

"Don't notice him, Dick," said he, in a side whisper to his partner. "He is a dangerous man."

"Oh, he is, hey? Joe, you're my pard; but I shall begin ter think yer somehow dead stuck on a fraud if yer talk that way ter me any more," said Dick, waving him away in a peremptory manner.

"I say, Dick," said Hank Hooker, a comical little specimen of humanity, homely as a mangy steer, but nevertheless all dressed up in his best clothes, and there on that occasion, hoping to captivate Julia Barmore, like the majority of them. "I say, isn't she a beauty?"

"A very handsome gal, Hank," replied Dick, at the same time watching Bill Barton out of the corner of his eye.

"Wall, I should say so. Why, gol darn my picter, if she arn't purtier'n a new pistol, she is, by thunder," said he, striking the bar with his clenched fist. "But, I say, Dick, I sorter guess as how yer ther man."

"Me?"

"Oh, you sly dog! Don't I see how yer worked yer keerds? Didn't I see her a larfin at yer real purty?" Wall, I guess yes. Why, she scarcely noticed me, although I had a clean shave, an' a biled shirt on. But I s'pose that's 'cos I arn't the game cock of Deadwood."

"Game cock!" sneered Barton, and then he chuckled to himself.

It was evident that he intended to pick a quarrel with Dick, and he would have resented it instantly had he not met the pleading eyes of Joe Cranston. The look that was in them disconcerted him, and he walked away to join some friends.

"Game cock of Deadwood!" again sneered Barton, this time looking at Joe. "Say, young fellow, that pard of yours is a sheep!" he added.

"But he is not afraid of wolves, if he is," replied Joe, quickly.

"Oh, he isn't, eh? They'd better call him the dung hill of Deadwood. But you seem sort of fresh," he added, looking Joe over from head to foot. "Maybe he keeps you ter do his fightin'."

"No, sir; Dick does the fighting. But you don't want to pick a row with him, for he has never injured you."

"Well, it's lucky for him that he never did, for if he had, you'd have been hunting around for another partner before this time. Go and tell him that I say he is a coyote."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, sir."

"Well, you had better not. Git away from here!" he added, savagely, and, wishing to avoid trouble, Joe walked away.

Barton watched him while standing with his back to the bar.

"Where have I seen that face and those eyes?" and then he appeared to fall into a reverie, although it could not have been a pleasant one, if it brought up much of his past life.

"What's ther marter with yer, Bill?" one of his gambling friends asked.

"Why?" he asked, looking up.

"What are yer trying ter do—pick a muss with Dick Trigger?"

"Yes—he's putting on altogether too many airs around here. Another thing—he seems to have the call with that girl, and I think I'll have to shoot him."

"Better look out, Bill."

"Why?" he asked, quickly.

"'Cause Dick's a bad un."

"Bah!"

"I say, Bill!"

"Well?"

"He's got a fat bag of dust," said his friend, speaking in a whisper.

"Well, what of it?"

"If yer goin' ter let his sap out, s'pose we manage to hook on ter ther dust first off?"

"How?"

"Let me dare him for a quiet game of poker, an' we stand in agin him. We can skin him, an' then I don't care what yer do."

"No, I'll have nothing to do with the game; I don't care what you do, but I'm going ter have a square fight with him, and if I wasn't afraid of his friends I'd shoot him on the fly."

"Better go slow, Bill, for he's got more friends 'n any man in Deadwood."

"Bah!" was his only reply, as he walked away.

"Hello, Bill!" said Hank Hooker, who by this time was feeling first-rate, "seen ther gal?"

"Yes; why?"

"Wall, isn't she purty 'nough ter eat? Hang me if I wouldn't give all my pile if she'd only grin at me as candy-like as she did on Dick Trigger. Oh, my!"

"You be darned," and as he growled the curse, he walked away.

"Wall, guess he's lost a game, somehow," replied Hank, laughing. "Maybe he's n'ad 'cos ther gal didn't go stuck on him so quick as she did on Dick. Don't feel very ticklish 'bout it myself, but I won't be such a darned fool as ter git sour over it," he mused, and then he continued his rounds among the miners who still filled the bar-room, all the while expatiating upon the wonderul beauty of Julia Barmore.

She was beautiful, but in Hank's eyes she was simply seraphic—beyond all the pictures he had ever seen or anything he had ever imagined, and the oftener he drank at the bar the handsomer she became, and the higher his enthusiasm rose.

But nearly everybody was feeling good, and the landlord was making a holiday of it, at the same time seeing that his niece was bound to greatly enhance his trade.

"What did he say to you, Joe?" asked Dick, when they afterwards met.

"Oh, nothing, Dick."

"Young feller, yer my pard, an' I like yer next ter myself, an' sometimes a darn sight better. But come har, I want ter chaw atmosphere with yer a few minits," said Dick, drawing him away from the crowd. "Now tell me what yer interest is in Bill Barton?"

"Why, didn't I tell you, Dick?" asked Joe, looking up at him with his big, gray eyes.

"Yer did! Wall, didn't I tell yer that he war no good—that he war married ter another woman—that he war a bad un from surface clar down ter bed-rock?"

"Yes," replied Joe, sadly.

"An' don't yer believe it, pard?"

"Yes, Dick, I do. I am sorry to say I do."

"Sorry!"

"Sorry on her account."

"Bah! Ther quicker she's clear of such a cuss as he is, the better for her. But thar's somethin' sorter strange in yer actions to-day, Joe," he added. "What's ther matter?"

"Nothing, Dick, nothing; only what I have told you."

"Wall, yer must think a darned sight of the gal then."

"I do, Dick; she is a very dear friend of mine," replied Joe, quickly.

"All right. Maybe yer in love with her yerself, yer sly rascal."

"Yes, Dick, I am in love with her."

"Wall, then write ter her, an' tell her what yer know about him, an' maybe yer can get her yerself."

Joe shook his head dubiously.

"Oh, sorter helpless case, eh? Wall, never mind. She arn't the only gal in ther world. Why, der yer know I think Julia in thar is sorter stuck on yer?"

"On me? What makes you think so?"

"Wall, she war a-askin' bout yer very particular."

"Oh, she would never love me while you were about, Dick," said Joe, smiling.

"Don't know 'bout that. Gals ar' cur'os. But go in an' see what she has ter say."

"I'll go in and speak a good word for you, Dick, but I cannot love her, even if she should take it into her head to love me."

"All right; go in," replied Dick, hoping in his heart that he would speak in his favor.

What Dick Trigger had said was true; Julia Barmore had been greatly interested in Joe from the moment she had set eyes on him, and in a short time they were in earnest conversation, she being determined to clear up the mystery of where she had seen his face, and why it haunted her so.

But scarcely had he left Dick before Bill Barton purposely ran against him in the bar-room, and then said most insolently:

"You are in the way, Mr. Gamecock."

"Oh, I am, hey? Suppose you put me out of your way," replied Dick.

"I think I can do it."

"An' I s'pose yer can't."

"You're the gamecock of Deadwood, are yer?" sneered Barton.

"Yes, Bill Barton, I'm the gamecock of Deadwood, an' I'm ready to make it good," said he, with his hand on his pistol.

"Hold on thar, boys, I won't have any of that here ter-day," cried Yank Butts, the landlord. "No shootin' here ter-day, if yer please."

"But he has insulted me, landlord," replied Dick.

"Then he shall apologize, or he shan't have another cent's worth of trust in this tavern," replied the landlord.

"Apologize to a dunghill—a coyote?" said Barton, grasping his pistol.

"Hold on thar!" cried several of Dick's friends. "Put up yer guns!" and in an instant there were hands on fifty revolvers.

"Bill Barton, yer clear out of this yer ranch or we'll h'ist yer," said the landlord.

"No, I'll not. He has got to fight," replied Barton.

"That's me, all ther time, ole man."

"All right, we'll settle this thing right here. Are you ready?"

"Yes," and in an instant their weapons were out and big excitement raised.

"Hold on hyer," cried Sid Smith, a friend of Barton's, and full as bad. "Let's have this thing a little different."

"How?" asked a dozen.

"I went ter see a square shoot; I went to see a game shoot. Maybe Bill's right, an' maybe he arn't—we don't care which way it is, but as this yer is a sorter holiday, a Fourth of July, so ter speak, let's make it interestin'."

"Well, how?" asked several, and the men were held apart until Sid had a chance to develop his plan for the holiday duel.

"Let us see who's ther game-cock of Deadwood—Dick Trigger or Bill Barton."

"Oh, we know now," they replied, while the landlord was appealing for peace and trying to get into the ring which the friends of the combatants had formed around them.

"Wall, maybe we don't. Now, I propose that they face each other five paces apart, an' walk toward each other until they cross muzzles before they fire. That'll show game."

"I am willing," replied Dick, quickly.

"And so am I," said Barton.

"Boys, will yer stop?" shouted Butts.

"No, we won't," replied Barton.

"Wall, if yer've got no respect fer me an' my tavern, won't yer show a little regard for my niece?"

"No, Yank; it's got ter be fought out now," said Dick, resolutely.

"Wall, will yer ageee to one thing?" asked Butts, forcing his way into the ring.

"What is it?" asked both of the men.

"That you'll only fire once."

"No," growled Barton.

"Yes, one's enough," cried several.

"All right," said Dick.

"I'll not agree to it," said Barton.

"But yer must," cried a dozen voices.

"Yes, an' we'll lynch ther man as fires a second shot," said several, and Barton knew that they meant it most earnestly.

"Very well, I'll agree to it," he said, finally, thinking that if he did not kill him then that he could do so at some future time.

Everything being agreed upon, the antagonists were placed five paces apart, each with his revolver drawn and cocked.

They received the word and began to approach each other, either weapon pointed at the other's head.

There was breathless silence in the room, and men stood ready to see that not even an attempt should be made to fire more than one shot apiece.

Finally the barrels of their pistols crossed each other. It was a question of strength now, and they began to parry, each trying to force the other's pistol away, so as to get a fair shot.

Dick proved the stronger and the quicker, for, thrusting Barton's pistol aside at the instant he pulled the trigger, the shot went harmlessly by his head, and firing at the same instant, he shot a hole through his right ear.

Friends grasped them to make sure that another shot should not be fired.

CHAPTER III.

"Both game!" cried the crowd, after the shots had been made. "Both game," and handshaking and congratulations were instantly in order among the miners who were gathered at the Bed Rock tavern to celebrate the arrival of Julia Barmore.

But of course the report of the pistols alarmed the girl, who had scarcely ever heard such a thing in her life, and Joe Cranston, suspecting what had occurred in his absence, left her side and hurried to the bar-room.

"Thar, yer cur, I've marked yer fer life," he heard Dick Trigger say as he entered.

"All right, but remember that after to-day I shall shoot you on sight," remarked Barton.

"Without warning?" asked Bill Tover, one of Dick's friends.

"Yes, as I would a dog."

"Then we'll hang you as a dog," was the reply, which the miners emphatically indorsed.

This Barton knew only too well they would do, and with a curse he turned away, got his pony, and soon after left the tavern.

"Three cheers for the Gamecock of Deadwood!" roared Bill Tover, and you bet those cheers were given with a will.

"That thar's me every time, boys. Landlord, set 'em up for ther party," said Dick, as his friends surrounded him.

Finding that Dick was unharmed, and that Barton had rode away, Joe returned to the reception-room to report the matter to Julia Barmore, with whom he was conversing at the moment of the shooting, and explained the matter to her.

"Actually shooting at each other?" exclaimed Julia.

"Yes. Such things are common out in this wild country. This Barton is a very bad man, and is always quarreling with somebody. As for Dick Trigger, he is as quiet as a child if he is not imposed upon; but if he is, let the provoker beware," said he, warmly.

"But what was this quarrel about?"

"About you, Miss Barmore."

"About me?" she asked, surprised.

"Yes. Barton is a reckless gambler, a ruiner of girls, and he came here calculating to captivate you; but seeing you manifest your preference for Dick, he resolved to pick a quarrel with him. And he did so, but got the worst of the encounter."

"Can it be possible?" mused Julia. "And Mr. Trigger is your partner in business, is he?"

"Yes. We work a claim and own a ranch together."

"And you think very much of him?"

"Yes. He is one of God's noblemen, and everybody loves him," replied Joe, earnestly.

Julia gazed at the youthful miner a moment without speaking.

"Have you any relatives in New York?" she finally asked, and Joe started suddenly at the question.

"Oh—ah—I had forgotten that you are from New York," he stammered.

"Have you ever been there? Do you know a girl by the name of Josephine Cranston there? Is she any relation of yours?" asked Julia, looking closely into his face.

"Slightly, I believe," replied Joe, blushing like a school-girl.

"You very much resemble her, at all events, and I thought you must be a near relation, since your name is the same," said she, with strange significance.

Joe continued to blush and choke.

"Well, some time, Miss Barmore, I may tell you how nearly I am related to Miss Cranston. But are you acquainted with her?"

"Very slightly, and have not seen her in several years. But I remember her from having heard that she fell in love with some wild, worthless fellow, who finally deserted her, and she soon after disappeared from society, probably to follow his fortunes."

"Yes, I believe so; that is, I think I have heard that she did," said Joe, musingly.

"Poor girl, she is to be pitied."

"Yes, indeed she is."

"But you are very much attached to Dick Trigger, you say?"

"Yes, he is the bravest and noblest man I ever met. They call him the game-cock of Deadwood, because he is always ready to fight or take the part of his friends, at the same time being as harmless as a kitten. And besides, isn't he very handsome?" he added.

"I agree with you; he is very handsome, and the most manly looking man I ever saw in my life. What part of the country does he come from?"

"He was born in St. Louis, and drifted out this way years ago in search of adventure and a fortune," replied Joe.

"Well, which has he obtained the most of?" asked Julia, smiling.

"Of adventure he has had about as much as any man of his age, and as for fortune—well, I think he already has a good-sized one, and our claim is turning out first-rate."

"I am glad to hear it; for I think he deserves good fortune. When shall I see you again?"

"Oh, we come to your uncle's tavern two or three times a week and if you stay here long you will probably see us both often. And, do you know, I wish you would love Dick?" he asked, in a trembling voice.

"What!" she exclaimed, glaring at him.

"Oh, but perhaps you could not love such a rough-and-ready sort of a fellow as he is; but I think if he should find some one to love, he would not be so wild. Love always tames and sometimes breaks the heart," said Joe, and there was a strange pathos in his voice.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Do you know so?"

"Yes," replied Joe, and getting up, with a polite bow he turned to leave her.

But as he did so he encountered Dick Trigger, who was standing in the doorway. There was a strange look in his face that he had never seen before, but he instantly understood that Dick was irritated at the attentions bestowed on him by the girl he was evidently in love with.

"Well, Dick, shall we go?" he asked.

"No; not yet, unless you've got yer claim all staked out thar," replied Dick, motioning with his head toward Julia.

"Isn't she nice?"

"Oh, that's all right, pard."

"I have been speaking lots of good words for you, Dick."

"Oh, I dare say. That's human natur for a chap as is stuck on a gal fer to speak good words for some other chap. Oh, yes," and Dick laughed in a cold, unnatural way.

"I hope you are not jealous of me, Dick?" said Joe, placing his hand on his arm.

"Mel! Bah! Go an' get the ponies out an'

"we'll return ter ther ranch, Joe," said he, with an evident effort to appear calm and indifferent.

"All right, Dick," and Joe hurried away.

Dick felt foolish and mean, and already hated himself for what he had said and the way he had acted, but to save his life he could not help it.

But mustering up courage he went into the room where Julia Barmore stood, looking from the window at some miners who were wrestling, and quietly approached her.

"Wall, good-bye, Miss Barmore," said he, as he stood there, hat in hand.

"What! are you going, Mr. Trigger?" she asked, turning quickly to him.

"Yes, we must return ter our claim. I hope yer feel much at home here."

"Oh, yes, everybody has been so kind to me that I could not fail to feel so," said she.

"I'm right glad to hear it. How d'yer like my pard?"

"Oh, he is a very nice young man."

"Oh, he is, eh?" mused Dick.

"Yes; don't you think so?"

"Sartin—sartin as snakes, Miss Barmore."

"Of course you could but have the same feeling towards him that he entertains towards you."

"Oh, Joe's a good un."

"And he thinks you are the best in the land. Indeed he did little else than praise you."

"Is that so? An' you like him?"

"To be sure I do. Don't you?" she asked, looking at him with a ravishing smile.

"In course—in course. But we're goin' away now."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Oh, some time; but I'll send Joe up every two or three days."

"Do, please," she said, eagerly, and he looked at her almost amazed.

"Sartin sure. I'm not ther chap ter keep people apart as thinks so much of each other," said he, with a sigh.

"But you will come yourself often, will you not?" she asked, archly.

"Oh, I may happen round here once in a while; but yer know ther old sayin'?"

"What one?"

"Two's company an' three's a crowd."

"Oh, don't say that, Mr. Trigger. I shall be ever and ever so glad to see you, ever and ever so often," said she, offering him her hand.

"Wall, Joe'n I'll have a tork over it," he replied, in a half-sullen sort of way.

"Do; and be sure and come often, for my uncle and aunt like you ever so much."

"Do they?" he asked, and instantly the idea popped into his jealous heart that she wanted him to visit the tavern often on this account, while caring nothing in particular for him herself.

But they parted, and Joe and Dick mounted their ponies for a ride back to their ranch.

Dick, however, was moody and silent, scarcely speaking a word all the way. For the first time in his life he was in love, and for the first time jealous of a supposed rival.

Joe Cranston understood it all, and tried to turn his thoughts into other channels, at the same time managing to assure him, as much as a jealous man can be assured, that he cared nothing for the beautiful Julia.

But Dick was not inclined to say much on any subject. He had fought with Barton right up to the pistol's mouth, more because he had presumed to make his boasts regarding Julia Barmore than because he detested the man or resented his insults; but here he found his hopes, as he thought, blighted by his youthful partner—the man above all others whom he loved.

The next morning, however, they both resumed work on their claim, Joe remaining behind at the ranch, to put it in order, to join him an hour or so afterwards.

But he could not help noticing that a great change had come over Dick. Before this, his cheery voice was almost continually heard singing and ringing through the gulch in which their claim was situated; but now he was working in moody silence.

Joe was never so sorry for anything in his life; but he could not help it.

"The big, noble fellow," he mused; "he is in love with that girl, and is actually jealous of me. Ah, if he only knew!"

Well, Dick remained in this mood for several days before he began to brighten any from his sulkiness; but finally he grew to be more like his old self.

Saturday night, above all others, is set

apart by miners for going to the nearest town or village for supplies or for frolic. But in this instance, and at this time, Bed Rock tavern was the grand center, for here the weekly mail was brought, to be distributed by Landlord Butts; and, in fact, the miners made it a point to gather there every Saturday night, to exchange news, receive their letters, and have a hurrah.

And of course Dick and Joe were there, with others, and things were lively, as they usually were on such occasions.

Dick had recovered almost entirely from his moodiness, and appeared as jovial as ever with his acquaintances; but of course he did not lose much time before seeking out Julia Barmore.

She was seated with her aunt in the sitting-room of the tavern, and having recovered from the fatigues of her journey into that rough country, was looking even more radiantly beautiful than ever, and Dick Trigger was more deeply smitten than ever.

She received him with marked cordiality, and Dick could scarcely find his tongue, so frustrated was he.

"I am very, very glad to see you, Mr. Trigger. Pray be seated. How have you been, and how is your partner?" said she.

"Oh, we've both been fust-class, thank yer. An' how've you been?"

"I have entirely recovered from the fatigue of my journey, and am now feeling splendidly."

"That's good. Yer lookin' splendid."

"Do you really think so, Mr. Trigger?"

"Please call me Dick. Everybody calls me Dick, an' when I hear a person callin' me Mr. Trigger, I sorter think as how ther torkin' 'bout somebody else," said he; at which she laughed heartily and promised to comply with his request. "Der I really think so? Wal, I never seen such a purty gal in my life as you are," he added, with charming frankness.

"Ah! I fear that men are flatterers, whether in town or country. But I am very anxious to see your partner," she added.

"Oh, you be?"

"Yes, I have taken a great interest in him, do you know?"

"Wall, yes, I—I thort so," replied Dick, experiencing a heart twinge at the same time.

"You won't let him return without seeing me, will you?"

"Oh, no, I'll go an' send him right in," replied Dick, springing up to go.

"But you are not going so soon?"

"No; only I'm goin' ter send Joe in."

"But yet you will come in again yourself before you go?" she asked, kindly.

"Wall, maybe," he replied, going from the room, leaving Julia somewhat dazed at his abruptness, although finally concluding that it was simply the style of those rude miners.

He walked toward the bar, where a crowd of miners were drinking and talking, and near by he espied Joe Cranston, looking blue and dejected.

"Ther fool's jealous of me," he mused, "or he'd never look so glum as that. Joe, she wants yer," he added, pointing back with his thumb to the room he had just quitted, and then joining his friends.

Joe glanced at him in a quizzical sort of a way and then started for the sitting-room, muttering to himself, "poor fellow, if he only knew!"

The conference between Joe and Julia must have been one of exceeding interest, for half an hour afterward, when Dick looked in to see if his partner was ready to go, he saw them holding each other's hands and fancied that there were tears in both their eyes.

"That thar settles it," he muttered, as he turned away. "They're dead stuck on each other, an' I may as well pull up stakes an' abandon ther claim. Bah! I mightier known that those great big gray eyes an' those soft cheeks of his'n would er taken ther cake. But he may have her; I'm done. I hold up my hands. But arter all, Joe aren't ter blame. He's only human, an' got just as much right ter love her as I have. But I can't stay on the diggin's, an' see him get her. No, no; Joe'n I'll bust up our pardnership, an' I'll cl'ar out somewhar an' let him have it all his own way. He's a good feller; he desaves ther gal, but I can't stay an' see him git her; no, no! I must cl'ar out of this yer right away;" and moodily he returned to where his friends were holding high Saturday night carnival.

They all noticed a change in him, but few had any idea of the cause of it, only they mar-

veled the most at his refusing to drink with them any more.

Finally he sent "Jumping Jim," a negro employed about the place by Butts, to tell Joe that he wanted to speak with him; and when he came out into the bar-room, he said:

"Joe, you better go back ter ther ranch; I'm goin' over ter spend Sunday with Hank Hooker."

"Not going home, Dick?" asked Joe, going closer to him.

"No, I'll be thar Monday mornin'," said he, and without another word, and seemingly anxious to avoid further conversation, he motioned to Hank, and they walked out of room with a good-night to all.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MURDERED PARTNER.

THE feelings of Joe Cranston may well be imagined at this snub on the part of Dick Trigger, who before this had never treated him but in the most gentlemanly manner.

Finding that he had really gone, he went back to Julia Barmore and told her all.

"But that will be all right," said she. "I do love him dearly, and now that we understand each other, I will take particular pains to show him that I do. There will be no occasion for our being seen together so much after this, and his jealousy will subside. Indeed, he will laugh at himself when he learns the truth, if he ever does."

"But he must never know it. In a short time I shall return East and give him no further trouble," said he, sadly.

"When will you come to see me again?"

"Next Saturday at farthest, and perhaps sooner."

"But are you not afraid to ride back to your ranch alone?"

"No, I have become used to this life, and my pony knows every yard of the trail. Good-night," and greatly to the astonishment of Landlady Butts, they kissed each other at parting.

The ride back to the claim was indeed a lonely one. The night was dark and a most oppressive silence brooded over the veiled face of nature. But, busy with his sad thoughts, Joe continued his way, scarcely noticing how fast or how slow he was going towards home.

How lonely the night was after reaching home! How cold and dark the ranch seemed! What a flood of thoughts sped through his brain while yet awake, and in what weird and fantastic shapes they came to him in his sleep!

And what a dreary Sunday it was without Dick! It was the first Sunday in over a year that they had been apart. Into what a whirlpool were they drifting.

Had he been there that gloomy day, he might have unfolded to him the secret of a wild and inharmonious life. But he was away, and double gloom seemed to settle upon everything about their claim.

But he roused himself finally, and put the place in tidy order, hoping and almost believing that he would ride over from Hank Hooker's ranch during the day.

Yet the hours sped along and he did not come.

What a long, dreary Sunday it was! Never before since they had been partners had he put in such a miserable one.

Finally the setting sun began to gild the Black Hills and to cast long shadows from the leafless trees of Deadwood.

"No, he will not come!" sighed Joe, and then he went to a little old leather bag and took out some papers.

They seemed to be mostly old letters, and over them he pored until the light of day went out, and then he lit a candle.

A stranger would have been puzzled to make out what he was doing, but finally he put the letters back into the bag and sat for a long time with his elbow resting on the deal table, evidently lost in retrospection.

For an hour or more he sat thus, seeming to be in a dream, and then, taking a sheet of paper, he began to write:

"DEAR DICK—I am dreadfully lonely to-night. If you only knew how much I missed you—if you only knew how miserable I am without you—you would not leave me thus alone. Such a strange feeling possesses me to-night in your absence. I am not afraid, but there is a weird sense of impending danger of some sort that overwhelms me, and I must write to you."

Here he stopped and read over what he had written, then glanced nervously around.

"Pshaw! I can destroy it, but somehow the act of putting my feelings into writing relieves me. She loves me and I love him. He loves her. Oh, God! But I must write. Yes, I must write or I shall go mad. Poor, dear soul, he is jealous of me!" and then again he was lost in meditation.

Finally, rousing himself, he began to write, and continued his letter thus:

"You love Julia Barmore and she loves you. She has told me so, and my prayer is that you may be happy in those loves. You make a great mistake, Dick, in being jealous of me, for I am—"

At that instant a noise on the outside of the ranch attracted his attention.

"It is Dick!" he said, joyously, at the same time putting away the unfinished letter and opening the door. "Dick!" he called, looking out into the darkness.

There was no reply to his salutation, and he paused on the threshold for a moment.

"Who is there?" he finally asked.

"I am here!" was the hoarse reply, and Bill Barton strode out of the darkness into the glow of the room.

"Bill Barton!"

"Yes; so long as you know me," growled the villain.

"What brings you here?"

"I come knowing that Dick Trigger is absent. Where is your dust?"

"Oh, you came for robbery, eh?"

"Yes. Do you see that hole in my ear?"

"Yes. Dick put it there."

"And this is the first part of my great revenge. I have come for his dust, and I am going to kill you to begin with," said the hard-hearted rascal.

"Indeed! So there is both robbery and murder in your heart?" said Joe.

"Yes, you sniveling fool! Where is your dust?"

"Hidden—where I will not tell you."

"Then you must die!"

"I can do that, William Barton, or otherwise William Banton," said he, at which the rascal started.

"You know me?"

"I do—God help me, I do!" said Joe, manifesting much emotion.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Josephine Cranston."

"What?"

"The girl whose life you blighted!"

"It is false!"

"It is not. I need not tell you how low I dragged me down, or that you finally led me, as you have others since then."

"What?" he cried, wild with rage.

"I know you now for what you are. I was weak enough to follow you, hoping to reclaim you. I adopted this disguise to enable me to go where you went. I have followed you until now, and find that you are not only false to me, but that you have been married and have proven false to the one you swore to honor, cherish and protect. I have found out all about you, William Banton, and your murders and robberies I am going so denounce to the world."

"What?"

"Love is dead, but revenge is sweet."

"But dead fools tell no tales!" said he, striking her quickly with a dagger.

"Oh! murderer to the last!" cried she, falling into a chair by the table.

"Yes!" And to make sure of his hellish work, he again plunged the knife into her and ran out of the room.

The knife had pierced her heart.

"Bill—Dick. Oh, Dick, come here quick! Dick! oh, oh, oh!" and she sank forward while seated in the chair, and resting her head on her arms upon the table, she died!

That troubled spirit was freed by the hand of the man who had ruined her life, and whom she had foolishly followed, in the hope of reclaiming him.

Dead.

Midnight!

Barton fled from the place without stopping to think of plunder. He only felt this, that he had put one more of his troubles out of the way, and he rode on towards Deadwood, happy in this thought, if, indeed, such a thought would make him happy.

Silence brooded over all.

There was the dead girl resting her head upon the table as though asleep.

She was asleep, the sleep that knows no

waking; the sleep that wipes out all the sorrows which grow and cling to life.

Utter silence!

Morning came, bright and beautiful.

The candle on the table had burned out with its last flicker as daylight came, but there sat the corpse, stark and alone.

Dick Trigger had been unhappy all the while, and at the first break of day he mounted his pony and started for his ranch.

But his mind was made up on one thing, he and Joe Cranston must part.

Julia Barmore loved him—there could be no doubt about that. Joe was a good fellow. The world was wide, and he had finally concluded to share their earnings equally, and to go away somewhere—and leave the only girl he ever loved to him.

With these feelings coming from his heart he entered the ranch and saw Joe in the position already described.

"He is asleep yet," said he. "Wall, it's better so. Joe's a good fellow, an' those eyes of his'n—ther allus got ther best of me. What nice soft har he's got," he mused, as he regarded the recumbent form of his partner. "I couldn't go back on Joe. Oh, no; he's such a gal-like sort of a fellow. I wonder if he really is asleep. Maybe he's only playin' it on me. But I don't care. He shall have half ther dust, an' I'll give him ther ranch an' all that belongs ter it," said he, and then he went to a certain place in the wall, and opening a secret panel, he pulled out a leather bag that contained at least five hundred ounces of gold dust.

"Wall, pard, I don't s'pose yer want ter tork ter me arter what's happened. She loves you, an' that settles it. Maybe I'm a fool—guess I am, pard, but thar's some things I can't stand. We've worked this yer claim for all she's worth, and she's panned out well. Here's one-half, an' you can keep ther ranch, for I'm goin' ter pull stakes."

As he said this he emptied the gold out upon the table, and commenced to divide it into two equal shares, all the while talking as though believing that his partner heard what he was saying to him.

"Thar, that's a squar deal, pard. Thar's a squar half of ther dust—wall, I'll chuck in another handful so's ter make sure. Yer can have ther ranch, Joe. I don't want it, an' maybe yer'll bring her here. Yer not asleep, Joe, I know yer not; but it's all right. I don't blame yer, Joe, for yer know'd I loved ther gal, an' she loves you. All right. Good-bye, Joe. I—I hope yer'll be happy. Thar's a squar deal between us—wall, here's another handful to make sartin, for yer've been a good pard ter me; squar's a brick. That makes it all right, don't it, Joe? Good-bye. I forgive yer. Don't even tell her that I war so dead stuck on her, will yer, Joe? Oh, I know yer'll never go back on yer ole pard. Good-bye, Joe! Yer won't speak ter me? Wall, all right," and with a wistful look, he walked out of the ranch, leaving Joe's share of their earnings upon the table before him.

Before a corpse!

CHAPTER V.

THE DISCOVERY.

DICK TRIGGER mounted his pony and rode away that quiet Monday morning, fully believing that he had dealt squarely with his partner, from whom he had separated, and there, all unknown to him, sat that partner at the table of their ranch, with his head resting upon his arms, and his arms upon the table, dead!

Dick believed all the while that he was making believe asleep.

He was jealous himself, and felt pouty, and he imagined that Joe Cranston, his partner felt the same way, and this accounted for his conduct towards him.

And Joe was dead!

Joe Cranston was really Josephine Cranston, a female in disguise, who had been his partner for more than a year, working a mining claim, yet the fact was all unknown to him.

He scarcely knew which way to go, but naturally drifted towards the "Bed Rock" tavern, although with no desire to see Julia Barmore, the landlord's niece, who had made all the trouble.

No, no, he did not care to see her, for he felt that she loved Joe, and that there was no show for him, and yet he could not go entirely away from the diggings without paying his final respects to old Yank Butts, with whom he had been acquainted so long.

Monday was a dull day at the tavern, and there was scarcely a person there besides himself, and his appearance created quite a sensation.

"Helloa, Dick! Why, this is Monday," said Butts, with a comical leer.

"Yes, Butts, I know it is," replied Dick, but there was something in his manner and the tone of his voice that made the landlord start and look at him.

"What, off on a lark?"

"No."

"No lark; and this is Monday?"

"Yes, this yer's Monday, but I'm off on no lark."

Then Butts winked to himself, and also to his wife, who was in the room.

"He is in love with Julia, and has come up here when he thinks there is nobody else in the way. Oh, the sly dog! Well, I used to do just such sly things when I was in love with my wife, and I suppose it's the same thing the world over," he mused.

"Julia will be down presently," said Mrs. Butts.

Dick looked up, but made no reply.

"Do you know, Dick, that she is perfectly charmed with this wild country?"

Dick looked up again without speaking.

"I feared that she would be shocked with the people whom she met, but on the contrary, she seems to love them."

"Love them! How many of them?" asked Dick, with a smile and a sneer.

"All of them."

"And one especially," added the landlord.

"Yes, I am aware of that," said Dick.

"Yer be? Did she tell yer?"

"Yes, she told me."

"Wal, yer don't look very happy over it," remarked Butts.

"Happy? No."

Butts and his wife exchanged glances.

"Julia is a good girl," ventured Mrs. Butts.

"I'd like ter hear some one say she warn't," replied Dick, with animation.

"Wal?"

"Wal?"

Butts and his wife again exchanged glances.

"I say, Dick, yer a trifle off ter day, arn't yer?" asked Butts.

"Yes, I'm away off," said he, moodily.

"I thought so."

"I'm away off outer these diggin's, Butts."

"What!"

"I'm done."

"Done?"

"Yes, I'm done."

"What do you mean, Dick?" asked the landlord, approaching him, wonderingly.

"I mean what I say—I'm done."

"Wal, but I don't exactly follow you, Dick. What are you driving at?"

"Me'n Joe's split."

"What!"

"Split."

"Don't tell me that, Dick."

"Yes, pard an' I's off. "I jus' come from ther ranch. I stayed with Hank Hooker over Sunday, an' went back thar this mornin'," said he, with considerable emotion.

"Wal, but what was it all about? I allus thort that you'n Joe was the lovinist pardners I ever saw. How is it, anyway?"

"Butts, that's our secret. I simply say as how Joe'n I's out. I gave him half of ther dust in ther ranch, for he has kept it beautiful since we've been pards, and he's a right to it all ther time," said he, earnestly.

"Dick, what's ther matter with yer? Did yer drink somebody else's whisky yesterday?"

"I drank nothing at all."

"But yer must have done somethin'."

"Think so?"

"Maybe yer took medicine."

"Medicine?"

"Pills or somethin'."

"No, my head is clar as a bell, Butts."

"But how is it that you 'n Joe broke off?"

"Didn't I tell yer that war our business? Yer gittin' down below payin' dirt, Butts."

"Ah! here comes Julia," said the landlady. "Here, come here, Julia. Dick is away out of sorts this morning; see if you cannot make him a little more sociable."

"Ah, good-morning, Dick. (Dick, you know, you know you wanted me to call you.) I am glad to see you," said the beautiful girl, as she came bounding into the room.

"Miss Barmore, I'm glad ter see you," said he, offering her his hand.

"Have you just come from your ranch?"

"I have, though it's my ranch no longer," said he, sullenly.

"What?"

"Wal, thar's no use in mincin' matters—Joe'n I's squared."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"We're out."

"Do you mean that you have parted?"

"Yes, that's it, Miss Barmore."

"Oh, how can that be?"

"Wal, we—" and he hesitated.

"What?"

"We can't both work the same claim."

"But you have been working it?"

"Oh, yer mean minin'?"

"Certainly. What do you mean?"

"Wal, I—I—wal, I mean something entirely different," said he, with an effort.

"Oh, you do? What is it, pray?"

"Wal, he'n I can't love the same gal, that thar's the bed rock of it."

"What do you mean, Dick?"

"Wal, maybe I'm a fool."

"I don't know about that."

"Probably I am."

"In what way?"

"Wal—I—I war dead gone on you, Miss Barmore, but I seen as how yer liked him ther best, so I pulled stakes, gave him one-half of the dust in the ranch, and now I'm off prospectin' for a new lead."

"Dick, do you part with him on that account?" she asked, earnestly, and at the same time thrilling him to the marrow by placing her hand on his shoulder.

"That's all. Joe's the finest ranch-keeper and ther best pard ever a man had. But once in a while I s'pose a chap gets silly."

"Well, I should think so."

"But it's all right. I step out an' give it all ter Joe."

"Are you really going away?"

"I am, Miss Barmore."

"Never to return again?"

"I'll never come back ter these diggin's agin."

"And all because you think I love Joe better than I do you?"

"That's it. But it's all right. I don't blame yer for lovin' him; I only blame myself for being such a fool as to hope yer'll love me."

"And what made you think I did not?"

"Good gracious, Miss Barmore! Didn't I see yer with my own eyes?"

"Now look at me, Dick Trigger, and say that you are a great big goose."

"Guess I am, without my lookin'."

"Do you know who your partner is?"

"He was Joe Cranston."

"Nothing of the sort."

"What?"

"If it has come to this I can hold the secret no longer. Your partner is Josephine Cranston, a girl whom I once knew in New York, and not the man, Joe Cranston, whom you have always taken her for."

"What is that yer say?" asked Dick, excitedly.

"Your partner is a woman, and not a man at all."

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Dick, aghast, and now this brought dozens of things to his mind to confirm what she said.

"It is true, and I know it. That is why we have been so familiar."

"Joe Cranston a gal?"

"True as the Bible."

"Wal, am I a fool?"

"I guess you are," said she, laughing.

"I guess so too. Har we've been pards for a year or more, and I never knowed it."

"Well, the secret was well kept from those who did not know her. She has for three years been following Bill Barton, and the better to be where he was, all unknown to him, she adopted male disguise, with what success you know."

"Great Moses! Bill Barton?" he asked, in a most excited manner.

"The very same."

"Wal, now I understand it," said Dick, remembering the anxiety she manifested regarding him. "But has she found out what he is?"

"She has, and repudiates him."

"Wal, that's some good."

"And she loves you."

"Loves me!"

"Yes—she has told me so."

"Oh, this yer's too much! My ole pard a gal an' in love with me? Miss Barmore, thar's something wrong," said he, under great excitement.

"What is wrong?"

"Either you are or I'm a fool."

"But don't get excited. Promise me that you will not reveal this secret unless you love her better than you do me," said she, taking him by the hand and gazing into his face most earnestly.

"Better than I do you! Wal, I don't know how it would have panned out if I'd only have known this afore. Joe allus somehow got right clus into my heart, an' many a time I've thort how much he war like a gal. But he war so handy 'bout everything; jus' as much ter home with ther ole pan as he wur at ther ranch, that yer couldn't help likin' him. But when it comes right down ter bed rock, I never was in love with but one gal in this world, an' that thar gal was you, Miss Barmore."

"But will you promise me one thing?"

"I'll promise yer a million!"

"Only one thing—that you will not betray her secret?"

"Great Moses! how can I? Joe'n I are out; we've divided."

"But now you see how foolish it was?"

"But I didn't know it. Oh, why didn't I put a bullet through that rascal's head when I had a chance instead of making a hole in his beaver?" said he, ruefully.

"Never mind that now, Dick. Will you do as I say?"

"Wal," and he hesitated.

"If I will tell you that I love you?"

"Yes; I'll do anything!" said he, recovering himself in his old-fashioned, earnest way.

"Go back to the ranch and buy her out. She wants to go East to her friends. Buy her out, for I know she wants to sell, and then she will settle the whole matter by leaving, resuming her proper apparel, and going back to the world again, as she wants to do. But will you promise me that you will not show her, either by word or deed, that you know this secret?"

"Miss Barmore—"

"Call me Julia."

"Julia, I swear that she shall never know from my lips that I know anything about it."

"I take you at your word. Now go back to your ranch and part harmoniously."

"I'll do so, Julia; but I don't know what he'll think after this."

"Never mind. I tell you that I know she has become sick at heart since she has found her lover to be so bad and reckless, and wants to go back into the world again."

"That settles it. I'll go back an' see Joe. I'll buy him out an' give him ther finest send-off in the world," said he, going at once from the house and mounting his pony.

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

DICK TRIGGER started on his way back to the old ranch, possessing a heart much lighter than when he left it in the morning.

And yet what wild and conflicting emotions crowded upon him.

The thought that he had been in partnership with a woman all these months, that they had exchanged confidences so freely, as one man to another, and above all, that she had been ruined by the rascal Barton, made him feel like shooting him on sight.

But how should he go back to her—his partner, with whom he had just exchanged final farewells and shared fortune—how could he approach her?

He thought the matter over deeply as he rode along, and finally concluded that he would frankly tell her that he had made a fool of himself, and had come back to have a talk over the matter and buy him out.

How little did he know!

He rode along, but in the meantime the ranch had been visited by miners in the neighborhood and Joe Cranston found dead.

Where was Dick Trigger?

What did it mean?

The news spread swiftly, and the miners gathered about the ranch.

Dick's absence was severely commented upon. There lay the nuggets of gold, fully three hundred ounces, and what could have been the object of the murder?

Finally some one suggested that perhaps Dick was jealous.

Indeed, it was well known that Dick regarded Joe as his rival for the love of Julia Barmore, and after talking the matter over, before the arrival of the sheriff, they came sadly and reluctantly to the conclusion that

Dick had murdered him in the heat of jealous passion.

Finally the sheriff arrived and took possession of the body and the ranch, but left the body as they found it.

Indignation ran high, for Joe was liked by every miner in the diggings, and the thought that Dick Trigger could murder him in cold blood, just because he found more favor in the eyes of the girl he was in love with, made them feel just like stringing him up at once.

Indeed, the feeling had got to that point when Dick Trigger rode up to the ranch, and was surprised at seeing such a crowd of people in and around it.

"Maybe Joe is sick," he thought, and he quickly dismounted from his pony and rushed into his old abode.

"What is it?" he asked, as he made his way through the crowd.

"You ought to know, Dick," said one of the miners.

"Know! Know about what?"

"Why, your old pard," said another.

"What of him?"

"He has been murdered, Dick."

"Murdered?"

"Yes. Go in and see him."

Dick did not wait for a second invitation, but rushed hurriedly into the ranch.

There sat Joe Cranston in the very position that he had found and left him in.

Dick seized him by the shoulder and called him by name, but he was rigid and voiceless.

"Who did it? Who—whar is he?" he demanded, turning wildly upon the miners who crowded silently around.

"When did you see him last, Dick?"

"Why, not more than two hours ago, an' he war sittin' right thar in the same place."

"Didn't yer know he war dead, Dick?" and the way he asked the question showed plainly that they all suspected that he was the guilty party.

"Know he war dead?" asked Dick. "Do yer s'pose I even s'pected it? No. Joe'n I had I row, or rather, I did, for Joe never mussed with anybody. I war a cussed fool, though, an' if I'd a-knowed what I've just found out I should never have done it."

"Done what?"

"Broke pardnerships. Boys, this yar's terrible, but I'll tell yer all about it. Yer know Julia Barmore? Wal, I got awfully stuck on her, but thort she loved Joe better'n me, so I made up my mind ter pull stakes an' let him have the whole claim ter himself. It worked me awful Saturday night, an' I could not bar ter come back ter ther ranch with him, so I went over an' spent Sunday with I Hank Hooker, an' thar made up my mind ter a come back an' make a squar divvy with him, s give him the ranch an' claim an' clar out. Ier found him just thar whar he is now."

"Didn't yer speak ter him?"

"Yes, in course I did, but he never looked up or answered me, and I took it that he war mad an' poutin'. I war fool 'nough ter think that he felt toward me jus' as I felt agin him. I told him what I war goin' ter do, but he never moved nor let on he cared a snap. So I brung out our dust an' made a squar divvy. There's his'n thar afore him now, just whar I put it, an' thar's mine," said he, holding up a bag containing really a smaller quantity of gold dust than there was on the table.

"An' didn't yer touch him?"

"No; I thort he war glad I war goin', an' so I hurried off, leavin' him right thar, as he sets now."

"He must have been dead then," said one of the miners.

"Yes, he's been dead a long time. See how cold and stiff he is," said another.

"An' the blood on his woolen shirt is hard and liver-like," added a third.

"But hold on, boys, ther strangest part of ther story's got ter come," said Dick, with much emotion. "With a sore heart I left ther ranch an' Joe, never calcerlatin' ter see either on 'em ag'in. I got on my pony with a few things, an' started for Bed Rock tavern. Thar I saw Julia, an' told her what I had done, an' that I was goin' ter leave the field cl'ar for she'n Joe. She seemed ter feel awful bad, an' tried ter have me not go, but I told her I never could stay 'bout ther diggin's an' see her love Joe Cranston. Then she up an' tol' me that she knew all about Joe, an' that he war a gal, an' not a man at all."

"Great Jerusalem!"

"Holy Moses!"

"It can't be possible!" and other like ex-

pressions of surprise and doubt came from the astonished miners.

"Let's see whar ther wound is," said Dick, and assisted by the others, they bent back the rigid corpse and placed it upon the bed.

Dick tore open the shirt; the miners started back in astonishment.

There was the dagger wound right over the heart, and there were indisputable evidences of her sex, and of the story she had told Julia Barmore.

Dick covered up the wounded breast and sank back into a chair speechless.

"Joe Cranston a gal! Wal that beats all I ever hearn tell on," said one of them.

"Why, it's just like them thar story papers!"

"Or them plays what yer see sometimes."

"My God! boys, this yar's too much!" said Dick, as he bowed his head into his hands, and they saw the hot tears trickle for a moment through his fingers.

Those astonished miners stood gazing from the stark corpse of the unfortunate girl and at the man whom they had never seen overwhelmed with grief before.

For several moments not a word was spoken. But presently Dick began to master his emotion somewhat. Going to the bed he took the hard but shapely hand of the dead girl and held it in his own for a moment, as he gazed into her face.

"Didn't yer ever have any 'spicions on it, Dick?" asked one of his friends, for they were friends again now, being convinced that he had not killed her.

"Never. I allus knowed that he war a queer, bashful fellow, and I never saw 'him undress in my life. He allus wanted ter sleep alone over thar on them buffalo skins, an', of course, that war his business, not mine. Yer know he allus looked galish an' never'd drink with any on us."

"That's so; an' we've often said as how he orfer have been a gal, if he warn't."

"An' he war so nice an' handy 'bout the ranch. Why, yer all know it war the best kept an' tidiest ranch in Deadwood."

"That's so."

"An' that accounts for it; he war a gal."

"An' I war jus' fool enough ter get jealous of him because he'n Julia war so thick tergeth, when she knowed all ther while that he war a gal like herself. Oh, what a coyote I am!" he added, savagely.

"But what made her do such a thing, I wonder?"

"Wal, boys, here's some more of ther story. Yer all know Bill Barton?"

"In course we do."

"Wal, it war all on his account."

"On his account?" they all asked.

"Yes, he married ther poor gal on East an' then shook her same's he has others. She dressed herself up in men's toggery an' follered him. She loved the scoundrel all ther time an' hoped ter get him back. But bimeby she found out all about him, an' it come mighty nigh onter killin' her, poor thing. Wal, when Julia Barmore come among us, she know'd her right away, an' she finally told her ther story just as I've told it ter you uns, an' thar I war—jealous of her!" he added, sadly.

"Whar is he, I wonder?"

"I heard he was over ter Cedar Camp on Saturday," said one of the miners.

"What! he war over ter Cedar Camp!" exclaimed Dick, suddenly.

"So Scratchin' Sam told me. He said as how he went over thar ter clean out ther miners, an' got cleaned out himself."

"Then, boys, that's ther dog that murdered my pardner!" said he, with great vehemence.

"Do yer think so?" they all asked.

"I'm almost dead sure on it. He would murder me if he got a good chance; but, probably findin' out somehow that I war spendin' Sunday over ter Hank Hooker's ranch, he stole over here ter do ther next best thing—kill my pard."

"Maybe she told him who she was?"

"Maybe; but I'm goin' ter find out all about it—bet your sweet lives I am. But, oh! if I'd a only been here—if I hadn't been such a coyote—he'd kept away, an' she'd been alive," he added, ruefully.

"But what's ter be done, Dick?"

"Hang me if I hardly know. Bill, ride right up ter Bed Rock tavern, an' Bring Mrs. Butts an' Julia down. Then see Hank Hooker—he's a handy sort of a cuss with tools—an' tell him ter make a coffin for ther poor gal. Will you uns stay here with me?"

"Sartin sure, Dick."

"An' will yer go, Bill?"

"In course I will," said he, going from the ranch and mounting his pony.

There were no doctors, lawyers, coroners or courts in Deadwood at the time, and everything was left to the rough miners, who dealt out justice according to their own notions.

The news of Joe Cranston's murder spread through the mining camps around the Black Hills with great rapidity, for Gentle Joe, as he was sometimes called, was known by nearly everybody.

But when this was supplemented with the astounding news that she was a girl in the disguise of a miner, it created a great sensation, and in a few hours the ranch where her dead body lay was crowded with men of all grades, anxious to learn all they could regarding the tragic mystery.

Mrs. Butts and Julia Barmore were there, and mournfully superintended the rude preparing of the body for the grave.

Julia's grief was painful to witness, but with streaming eyes she assisted her aunt in those delicate duties which only one of her sex could properly attend to.

The story was told and retold; the wound examined at Dick's request, and then the body of the unfortunate dead was consigned to a grave near at hand, dug on a little knoll under a spreading cedar tree, where she often used to sit and muse over her wrecked and wretched life.

"Now, then," said Dick Trigger, as they all turned from the humble grave, "ther sad work's done; now comes ther pleasant part."

"And what is that?"

"Huntin' down the murderer!" said he, with clenched fists.

CHAPTER VII.

HUNTING FOR THE MURDERER.

Yes, Dick Trigger turned away from the grave of Josephine Cranston—always before then known as Joe Cranston, and his partner—with a vow on his lips and revenge in his heart to seek out the murderer.

He did not know what a task he had undertaken, but he feared nothing, and held but one purpose in view.

Closing up his ranch he went to live for the time being at the Bed Rock tavern, from which point he calculated to work.

When I say that he closed his ranch, I must not be understood, as I might be, if speaking of such a thing in other than those sparsely settled regions, for the only closing that is ever done is simply shutting the door.

Anybody has a perfect right to enter the ranch of another during his absence, and cook or stay over night there—those who are on the tramp, I mean—and all that is expected is that everything shall be left as it was found.

This simple and hospitable custom is found everywhere in new mining towns or camps, and is certainly worthy of all praise.

Miners sometimes go off prospecting and are gone days, and in his absence another, who may be on the go, can go into the ranch and make himself at home, and it is a very rare thing to find this custom abused, for woe betide the fellow who might do such a thing; he would be outlawed forever.

Bill Barton did not quit Deadwood or its vicinity just then, as one would naturally suppose that he would. No, his revenge was not half satisfied yet.

But he took good care to keep out of Dick Trigger's sight and to talk about the murder of the unfortunate girl among the sympathizing miners, only to attempt to convince them that Dick was really the murderer.

"Don't you see that it was him?" he would ask. "He knew that Joe was a girl all the while; but when this Julia Barmore popped up he got dead struck on her, and his old girl, Josephine, made a kick, and most likely threatened to expose him to Julia so as to break his chances, and in the heat of his passion he knifed her."

"But how about ther divide?"

"Nothing easier. Wouldn't almost any man think of that dodge—let alone a sharper like Dick Trigger? He could afford to part with that little pile of dust for the sake of throwing off suspicion."

"Wal, that there may be so, but I don't believe it," was the answer he got in most cases.

But in spite of all the belief that Dick's

friends had in him, Barton's poison began to work. His explanation of it ran from mouth to mouth and from camp to camp in a sort of undertone, for not one of those hardy fellows was there who dared to confront the Gamecock of Deadwood with any suspicion of his complicity in the affair.

The story had a somewhat plausible look, and the more they talked it over the deeper became the secret feeling against Dick Trigger.

Finally one of his particular friends heard of what was being talked over, and he went boldly to him and told him all about it.

"That thar's ther whelp I'm gunning for," said Dick, tapping the handle of his revolver. "He's ther cuss that murdered her, an' if you see him, Bob, or if you get a chance ter send word ter him, jus' say that I'm out a-gunning for him, an' I'll shoot him on sight as I would a wolf."

"I'll do it, Dick, an' wish yer luck besides," replied Bob.

"Whar is he now?"

"Yer knows ole Whiskers?"

"Yes."

"Wal, he tole me this mornin' that he saw him ridin' towards Ordway, but thar's no knowin' whether he's gone thar or not. He's on ther go all ther time."

"Yes, like an eagle searchin' for prey. But he better not show up in these diggin's any more or cross my trail anywhar, for by ther God that made me, he'll have my life or I'll have his'n before we're much older."

The report that Barton had been seen on the road to Ordway was correct.

He had given up gambling for the time being almost entirely, and revenge seemed to have taken entire possession of him.

Dick Trigger had marked him for life, and everybody knew it. He carried the hole in his ear as the result of his duel with him, a mark of disgrace that could only be wiped out by his death, and to accomplish that he now devoted his life.

But assassinating him, or killing him in a duel, regular or irregular, was not enough; an ignominious death was the only thing that would satisfy his thirst for revenge.

Besides he had heard that Dick had found out the truth respecting his treatment of Josephine Cranston and had boldly accused him of the murder, at the same time threatening to take the law into his own hands.

Barton was not a coward, as has been shown, but he was not at all anxious to meet Dick Trigger, and especially not so since murdering his partner. Indeed, his guilt made him cowardly now, which together with his desire to have Dick lynched, made him even more cautious about meeting him.

At this time the only law known in and around Deadwood was lynch law. There were no courts of officers of the law short of Ordway, and whenever lynch law failed to satisfy the people of Deadwood when a crime had been committed, the court at Ordway sometimes took the case in hand.

Bill Barton had failed partially in rousing the miners to a pitch of lynching Dick, although he had undoubtedly succeeded in creating a certain amount of suspicion that boded no good to the Gamecock of Deadwood.

And now his object in visiting Ordway was to set the officers of the law at work upon the case, showing them his evidence, which would be corroborated against Dick Trigger.

But the first thing to do was to have the sheriff arress and lodge him in jail at Ordway, after which he would be secure in working up the case against him.

The sheriff of Ordway was named Mark Maddern, a man who had been mixed up in more crimes than any one whom he had ever arrested.

He had been a bad one ever since he came into the world, and especially ever since he had gone to the mining States. He had gone there at the outbreak of the Pike's Peak gold excitement, and had drifted from place to place, or been driven by indignant miners, until finally Ordway got him.

He had at one time been a partner of Bill Barton, and at one time, also, received a terrible flogging at the hands of Dick Trigger. This was a few years before, while living at Cheyenne City, and, of course, he was not greatly in love with him.

Barton and other gamblers had been instrumental in electing him to the office of sheriff, and could do with him about as they liked, hence the visit to him at this time.

"Is that so?" asked Maddern, after Barton had told him the story.

"That's exactly the size of it, old man, and now we both have a chance to get even with him," replied Barton.

"Well, what have you got back on him for Bill?"

"What! Do you see that ear?"

"Good God! why, there is a hole in it."

"Yes," he replied, with an oath.

"What made it?"

"A bullet from Dick Trigger's pistol."

"You don't tell me! How happened it that he got the drop on you?"

"Well, in this way," and he proceeded to tell him all about the desperate duel they had fought at the pistol-muzzles' mouth, or rather with the barrels of their pistols crossed, and the cause of the quarrel between them.

"Do you see it now?"

"Yes, but tell me about this girl. You say she was Dick's partner?"

"Yes, but, between ourselves," he said, looking around and lowering his voice, "she was an old girl of mine."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed the sheriff.

"Hush! yes, Josephine Cranston."

"The New York girl that you used to tell me about?"

"The very same. It appears that she put on men's clothes and followed me when I gave her the shake, and has been on my trail ever since."

"Well, well! What queer devils they are," mused the official dignitary, who could but remember some of his own experiences.

"I should say so!"

"But how did you find this out, Bill?"

"Well, between ourselves, you know—for you are as deep in the mud as I am in the mire—I heard that Dick had a big bag of dust, and as a commencement towards getting hunk, I resolved to get it away from him at the first favorable opportunity. Well, one Saturday night he went to Hank Hooker's ranch to spend Sunday with him, and there was nobody on the claim but Joe. So I just went in heavy, resolved to murder him, anyhow, as another part of my revenge. I demanded the dust, when the she-fiend ups and denounces me, calling me by name, and finally giving herself away."

"What a nerve she must have had!"

"Well, then, of course I was bound to put her out of the way."

"Oh, then you did the job?"

"Of course. Didn't you tumble?"

"Not at first."

"Well, don't you see how nicely I have woven the meshes of suspicion around Dick?" asked Barton, exultingly.

"Yes, you certainly have. But it will be a tough job to take him."

"Tough! Bah! You must use a little stratagem and catch him on the sly."

"But he is a tough one, though," said the sheriff, shaking his head.

"But don't you want revenge?"

"Yes," said he, slowly.

"Well, don't you see a chance here to catch on to it?"

"Yes, but I wouldn't think of attempting it with less than ten men."

"Well take a dozen along with you."

"Will you be one of them?"

"No, he has threatened to shoot me on sight, and if I was along with the gang he would become a perfect devil, and would give you twice as much trouble as he would if you went alone."

"Maybe that's so," mused the sheriff.

"Just disguise yourself a bit and have your men go along as miners."

"Is he at his ranch?"

"No; he is stopping at the Bed Rock tavern, where that girl lives. The cursed fool is just dead gone on her, and it would be hard work to get him away from where she is."

"All right, Bill, I'll take him, dead or alive," said the sheriff, although it was only too easily seen that he didn't relish the job.

"Oh, take him alive, by all means, for we must see him swing."

"All right." And with this they parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAPTURING THE LION.

"Now, then," mused Barton, as he left his old partner, the sheriff, "a swift noose shall choke that fellow to death. Curse him! I think the hole in my ear would grow up as his breath went out. A man or woman never

injured me that didn't bite the dust, and he shall be no exception. If I find that the circumstantial evidence against him is not strong enough, I will hound Judge Lynch upon him, for he must choke anyway, and then I will see who gets the beautiful Julia Barmore. Yes, if worse comes to worse, Judge Lynch can always be depended upon, and I have friends enough to carry out his decree. But I will remain here in Ordway until he comes, and then, when safely under lock and key and disarmed, I will taunt him until he roars."

The next day, Sheriff Maddern got together a posse of the roughest and most reckless characters to be found, and, disguising them as miners, set out for Deadwood, for the purpose of capturing Dick Trigger.

They arrived at the camp just at the verge of dusk, and the first person whom Maddern sought out, was Sid Smith, a friend of Bill Barton, and also on good terms with Dick Trigger.

"Hello, Mad, what brings you here?"

"Oh, nothing. I say, Sid, are we all alone?" he asked, looking cautiously around.

"Yes—why? What is your racket?"

"You've heard about it?"

"What?"

"Why, the murder."

"Of that gal—that pardner of Dick Trigger's?"

"Certainly."

"Well, they say it looks bad for Dick."

"Yes, I think it does, but the miners won't have it," he added.

"But yet there can be but little doubt as to his killing her to get at this new girl."

"Well, it looks that way to me."

"The story has reached Ordway, and I have come to arrest him."

"You have? How many men did you bring along to help you?"

"Well, about ten—good ones."

"That's what they want to be all the time. He goes out gunning every day for Bill Barton."

"Never mind about that. I propose to take him while he is off his guard. Now, I have got my men togged out like miners, and if you will only take us up to the tavern by and by and introduce us as prospectors who have just struck a new paying claim, I may catch him off his guard and collar him."

"All right; I'll work that part of the game for you, old pard," said Smith.

"I thought you would. What is the best time to catch him there?"

"Oh, almost any time; for he is so stuck on that girl that he can scarcely leave her long enough to take a drink with his friends."

"That's good enough. Suppose we start now?"

"Very well," said Sid, putting on his hat and coat and leading the way into the trail.

The sheriff's deputies were about as rough a lot as could be found anywhere; but being disguised as miners, nothing was thought of it when they were introduced by Sid Smith as such.

Dick Trigger joined the party in the bar-room before many rounds had been disposed of, and Sid Smith did the polite.

"New uns, eh?" he mused. "Wal, what'er goin' ter wash yer dust with?"

They named their drinks, and being as he supposed all strangers, he was thrown off his guard. He was looking for only one man, and feeling certain that he was not in the party of new arrivals, he became free and careless, just as Maddern wished him to.

"Well, gentlemen," said Dick, turning to the strangers, "har's hopin' yer'll find yer new claims ter be good dirt an' pan out fust-class."

"Luck on that!" said one.

"Down it!" said another, and every man in the party lifted his tumbler to his lips.

But, at a prearranged signal, one of the men snatched Dick's revolver from his belt, and the next instant he was tripped and thrown by four men, who fell upon him to hold him down while Sheriff Maddern placed a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists.

Dick was usually as quick as a flash, but this trickery took him by surprise, and the fall, for the instant, stunned and unmanned him.

The result was that he was a helpless prisoner before he even suspected anything.

"Hold on, thar—hold on! What's ther meanin' of this yar?" he finally demanded, when too late.

"Stand him on his pins!" said the sheriff, and Dick was assisted to his feet.

By this time Maddern had removed his trifling disguise, and now boldly stood before him as he never would have dared to do had he not been securely bound.

"Mark Maddern!" he finally exclaimed, after having looked at him for a moment.

"Yes," was his laconic reply.

"Ther sheriff from Ordway?"

"That's my measure, Dick Trigger."

"Well, what does this yar mean?"

"It means, that I came here to take you prisoner, and I've succeeded in doing it," replied Maddern, laughing mockingly.

"Prisoner! What for?" asked Butts, the landlord, rushing up to the group.

"For the murder of Josephine Cranston!"

"Oh, it is false! it is false!" cried Julia Barmore, rushing upon the scene just in time to hear those dreadful words.

"That's all right, Sis. You've a right to stick up for your lover."

"But he is innocent!" she persisted.

"So are you, maybe," sneered the sheriff.

"Hold on thar, Mark Maddern. Yer've got ther drop on me, an' maybe that's all right; but yer shan't insult a lady that way," said Dick, tugging at his handcuffs.

"Who'll prevent me?"

"I will!" said old Yank Butts, bracing up to the official rascal.

"You!" and he laughed most sarcastically.

"Yes. You have no right to insult my niece; and if my friends were only here, they'd clean out both you and your gang," replied the old man.

"Keep your shirt on, landlord. We don't want to harm you or yours. But we have caged the Gamecock of Deadwood, and that is all I want at present," said the sheriff.

"Oh, do not take him away!" pleaded the terrified girl. "Please do not!"

"Well, why not?"

"Because he is innocent."

"In your mind he may be; but not in mine, no, not by several."

"Be quiet, Julia. It is all right," said Dick, with all the calmness he could muster.

"All right—and you a prisoner with those dreadful handcuffs on?" she asked.

"Well, it will be all right, Julia."

"Yes, of course it will," said the sheriff.

"My boss enemy has done this yar."

"Who?"

"Bill Barton."

"Oh! then you don't consider me your enemy, do you?" asked Maddern.

"Yes, and yer have good reason to be. I flogged yer once for skinnin' a poor devil of a miner out of his dust. That war several years ago, an' before ther blacklegs made yer sheriff," said Dick, bitterly.

"It wasn't so long ago that I had forgotten it, Dick Trigger," said Maddern, bitterly.

"I am glad to know that you remember a good lesson so long, Mark. But what are you goin' ter do with me?"

"Take you to jail."

"On what charge?"

"Murder."

"Murder?"

"Yes, of a girl with whom you had long lived as your mining partner, but whom you murdered just because she naturally objected to your falling in love with another."

"It is false!" cried Julia.

"Of course it is," put in Landlord Butts. "Oh, how I wish it was Saturday night, when his friends were all here," he added.

"His friends all believe him guilty, and it is an act of mercy for me to arrest him and lodge him in prison."

"How so?"

"Because they would surely lynch him if I did not," replied the sheriff.

"You lie, Mark Maddern! Not one of them believe me guilty," said Dick.

"Well, if you only saw the letters I have received from them—the messages from those you reckon your friends—you would take a fall."

"I won't believe it," said Butts, earnestly.

"Nor I," put in his wife.

"And he knows he lies," added Dick.

"All right. It will all come out when you are put up for trial. I tell you that the thing is dead against you, and also that I believe you murdered the girl."

"Ah! you would never dare to say that, if I wear'n't hinged in this yar way. But I am in for it, I s'pose. Go on an' do your worst," said he, resignedly.

"No, no, they shall not take you away!" said Julia, most earnestly.

"Never mind, Julia. They've got the bulge on me now, an' they may work it clear down to bed rock. But yer'll know I am innocent all this while, won't yer?" he asked, going towards her.

"Yes, yes, of course I know you are innocent. But you are in the hands of your enemies, and they may murder you," said she, clinging to him.

"Wall, that's all they can do, girly."

"But isn't that enough?"

"No; if they murder an innocent man it only takes him out of the world; it doesn't harm his reputation. But I don't care, so long as you believe me innocent," said he, with much feeling.

"And that I shall always do. Oh! but this is terrible, terrible!" she added, bowing her head upon his manacled arms.

"Cheer up, Julia; I am not dead yet."

"No, but you've got a good show for being," said the sheriff.

"Oh, you can crow now, can't you?"

"Yes, better'n the Gamecock of Deadwood. But come, we've fooled around here long enough. Landlord, give us another drink."

"No, sir, not another drink here," said Butts, striking the bar with his clenched fist.

"All right. Help yourselves, boys," replied Maddern, turning to his gang.

And they wanted no further invitation. Going behind the bar they caught the old man up bodily and threw him over it, after which they helped themselves to what they wanted, and it was a good deal of all kinds.

"Interfere with the sheriff in the performance of his duty, will you?" demanded Maddern, as he assisted the old man to his feet.

"It serves you just right."

"Yars, it's contempt of court," said one of the bullies, putting a bottle of whisky into his capacious pocket.

"In course it is," said another, doing likewise; and all this while Sid Smith was pretending to be Dick's friend, and a friend of the landlord's, and yet claiming to be as powerless as he was innocent of the whole affair.

"Now, then, boys, get your ponies. It is a bright moonlight night, and we can reach Ordway by morning," said the sheriff; and four of them seized Dick Trigger and hurriedly forced him out of the bar-room.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT FOLLOWED THE ARREST.

Of course there was great excitement at the Bed Rock tavern over this affair.

Julia Barmore nearly fainted as she saw her lover forced away by his enemies, disarmed and handcuffed, and Mrs. Butts bore her to her room.

Old Yank Butts was very indignant, and, in spite of his love of peace, he was disgusted to think the sheriff and his posse of roughs did not come Saturday night, when his and Dick Trigger's friends would have been there.

But outside of the outrage, they had carried away nearly all his stock in trade, and his bar was almost a wreck.

Jumping Jim and Halleluja Jane, the two colored servants employed by Butts, came up very brisk and bold after the crowd had departed, although they had both laid low from the moment there were signs of trouble.

"Boss Butts, why warn't I heah?" asked Jim, coming in after the rumpus.

"Well, it would have done little good if you had been here," said the old man, sadly.

"Boss Butts, I see a bad man in a fight."

"Well, then, you would have had a bad show."

"How am dat so?"

"Because there was no fight."

"But dey lug away Dick Trigger."

"Yes, the sheriff took him away."

"Why hadn't I been here?"

"'Cos you was hidin' out'n dar behin' de barn," said Jane, spitefully.

"Who hid hind der barn?" demanded Jim, furiously.

"You hide dar; I seen yer; an' what's mo', I seen yer crawl under de barn."

"Go 'way, Jane, yer don't know nuffin'."

"Why don't I know nuffin'?"

"'Cos yer don't. I war huntin' hens' eggs when yer seed me go under de barn," said Jim, triumphantly.

"Oh, yer war, hey? Who eber hearn tell of huntin' hens' eggs under de barn in de night time?"

"Wal, dat am a matter ob perlitical 'conomy."

"How dat?"

"'Cos I ken see better in de night den I ken in de daytime," replied Jim.

"Go way dar, nigger. You war a skeer-crow, you is. I's got mo' spunk any day den you hab. Shoo!" and the wench gesticulated wildly and comically with her arms as she laughed loudly.

"You got spunk! What spunk you got?"

"Guess you wouldn't catch me a-scootin' under de barn when a row come."

"Go long! Wha' you do tuver day when Dick Trigger and Bill Barton hab de shoot?"

"What'd I do?"

"Crawled inter der meat box! ya, ya, ya! Crawled inter der meat box!" and now it was Jumping Jim's turn to laugh.

"Wall, who I fine dar?"

"Who you fine?" and he looked a trifle sober as he asked the question.

"I fine you dar, hidin'! ya, ya, ya! Skeered outer you life!"

"No such fing."

"Wall, how come you dar? Wha' you do dar in dat meat box?" she demanded, triumphantly, certain that she had him this time.

But Jim was equal to the emergency.

"Wha' I do in dar? I lose my jack-knife an' wur a-sarchin' fo' it in dar," he replied.

"Go way outer dat, you skeery nigger! How you sarch fo' dat knife wif de cober ob dat dox shut down?"

"Din I jus' tole yer dat I see better in de dark dan in de light? Go 'long!"

"Well, Jim, if you can see so well in the dark, I am glad of it," said Landlord Butts.

"'for the lantern is broken and the cattle want feeding."

This rather stumped the darky, for he knew that Mr. Butts had overheard all that he had said, and he scratched his woolly head and seemed at a loss what to say.

"Yes, go feed de cattle if you can see so well in de dark," said Jane, laughing.

"Wall, boss, I—I can't see so well in de barn," he finally replied.

"No, boss, he can't see in de barn, but he can see under it ter hunt hens' eggs. Oh, go way, fool nigger. If I owned you, does you know wha' I do wid you?"

"Wha' you do wid me?" he demanded, savagely.

"I swap you fo' a coyote—kill de coyote an' get out ob de breed. Ya, ya, ya!" and with another loud laugh and a wild flinging about of her black arms, she went to the kitchen.

"You better go get in de meat box," said he.

"'Fraid I'd fine you dar?" she called back.

"Dat am de sassiest wench—"

"Never mind her. I guess neither one of you would amount to much in a fight," said the landlord, who was trying to get things in order after the sheriff's mob had nearly cleaned out his bar.

"Me! Why, boss, I isn't 'fraid ob nuffin'."

"Very well. Go out and fodder the cattle," remarked Butts, quietly.

Jim had put his foot into it again by saying that he was afraid of nothing, and as there seemed to be no way of crawling out of it, he reluctantly left the house.

But he did not dare to venture so far as the barn, being the veriest coward in the world, and so he got behind a log that lay not far from the door, and crouching down, he resolved to brave the darkness for a few minutes, or long enough to make the landlord think he had been to the barn before returning.

Jane in the meantime had finished washing her dishes, and taking the pan of dish water, she went to the back door, and threw it out by the log behind which Jim was hiding, completely deluging him.

"Wal!" he cried, and this so frightened her that she ran into the house and fastened the door.

As for Jim, he was in a nice mess, wet from head to foot with dirty, greasy water, but he was afraid to acknowledge how he came to be so, and sneaking into the house, he crawled up-stairs to bed as quietly as possible.

Dick Trigger was borne in triumph to the jail at Ordway where Bill Barton was in waiting to gloat over him, and at his request the sheriff did not remove the handcuffs from his wrists, even after he had thrust him into the strongest cell.

Dick bore the outrageous treatment as well

as he could under the circumstances, but it did not need the coming of Barton to his grated cell door to convince him that he was the instigator of his arrest.

"Well, Mr. Gamecock, how do you feel now?" asked Barton, with a malicious chuckle.

"I feel as though I'd like ter have 'bout five minits' fun with ther biggest scamp in these 'ere parts," replied Dick.

"Ah, less than five minutes' fun with the sheriff will fix you before long!"

"It will, hey?"

"You bet."

"All right. It is a stand off, and we'll see which one of us ther sheriff gets first."

"Oh, for that matter he has got you now, and I'll take cursed good care that he keeps you until you perform your little rope dancing act," and he laughed like a fiend.

"We'll see 'bout that. Of course I understand that yer ther cause of my bein' 'rested."

"Of course I am, curse you, and I'll see that you don't escape either! Do you see that ear?"

"Yes, that shot went 'bout three inches wide of ther mark," replied Dick.

"And do you suppose I am going to let that mark go unavenged?"

"Wal, why don't yer get hunk now? Yer armed, an' I'm not, an' that wouldn't be any worse than murderin' a helpless gal that yer'd ruined."

"It is false! You murdered her yourself, and I can prove it."

"An' I say yer a liar, an' that don't need any proof."

"Well, I'll bet that you'll have to swing for it, anyway, and if there's no other way, I'll get up a lynchers' picnic for you. Do you understand?"

"That thar's because yer don't dar ter hav it go ter trial on yer evidence."

"It makes no odds about that; I'm bound to see you swing high. I might have shot you on sight a dozen times; I might shoot you like a dog now; but that wouldn't satisfy me; I must see you die the death of a dog," said Barton, savagely.

"All right; I'm game ter die anyway; but I aren't dead yet, Bill Barton," said Dick, turning and walking away from the grated door.

"Oh, you aren't, eh? Well, you soon will be if I can work the cards right," replied the villain, walking away.

It was a trying position for Dick, who knew only too well that he was in the hands of his enemies, from whom he could not expect even the mercy of a fair trial.

And as the dreary hours wore away, and night came on without the light of a single star to look from the heavens into his solitary cell, his courage almost broke for a moment.

What a chain of circumstances had the death of his partner woven around him, and easy it might be for those who did not believe him guilty of the murder.

And what of Julia Barmore?

There was some consolation in the thought that she did not believe him guilty—that she knew he was not; but should he ever see her again? Would the vindictiveness of this murderous rascal even permit him to come to trial? Alas! he knew him too well to believe that he would do so, unless sure of his conviction.

And what of his friends in Deadwood? Would they take any measures to befriend him, now that he was in jail? Had not the cunning arguments he had used in trying to awaken suspicion against him turned them against him? Did they not, in fact, believe him really guilty?

These questions run rioting through his mind the whole night long, driving sleep from his eyes, as he paced back and forth in his narrow cell.

Everything was silent and dark. The guard walked noiselessly in front of the jail, going occasionally around the building to make sure that all was right, and the few other prisoners were asleep.

It was nearly morning, and the air was damp and chilly, but Dick heeded it not. The continuous walking up and down in his cell, like a caged lion, kept his blood in circulation and all feeling of chilliness away.

Suddenly he heard something fall to the floor from somewhere, and he paused to listen.

Did it mean anything, or was it only the falling of a knot from some shrunken board in the ceiling overhead?

He listened for some moments, but could

hear no more. It must have been the fall of some trifling thing that had startled him, and he finally resumed his walking.

Presently, however, he stepped upon something that lay on the floor—something about the size of a hickory nut.

That was possibly what had fallen, and out of curiosity he picked it up.

It was a small stone, as he could tell by the feeling, but there was a string attached to it, and to the string a piece of paper.

That certainly must mean something. That was never a chance thing—an accident.

But it was total darkness in his cell, and he had to go entirely by the sense of feeling, which, of course, gave him but little satisfaction under the circumstances.

Oh, how he longed for daylight to come! Would it ever come?

Occasionally he heard a cock crow somewhere in the neighborhood, and this heralding was all the consolation afforded him.

He felt over the scrap of paper a dozen times. It seemed to be about the size of a half-sheet of note-paper; but whether it was written upon or not he could not tell.

The fact tormented him very much; but he finally thrust it into his pocket and resumed his blind marching to and fro.

An hour more of this, accompanied by most unenviable reflections, and the first gleam of the coming morning stole in at the grated window high above his head.

Indeed, he had scarcely noticed the little window before; but now what welcome rays were pouring into it! Feeble at first they were, and made him all the more impatient; but there was no way for him but to wait until the dawn was strong enough to enable him to see to unravel the mystery.

Finally it came. Standing close to the opposite side, he held the paper so that the light would strike it directly from the window.

There was writing upon it, but it was hardly light enough for him to read it.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND.

DICK TRIGGER waited impatiently for the light to become strong enough to enable him to read the mysterious paper.

He could see that it was in a fine hand—that it had undoubtedly been thrown in at the high grated window, which accounted for the stone which was attached to it.

Finally, by straining his eyes, he made out the following:

"DEAR SIR—Don't fail to call me when your trial comes, for I have valuable evidence in your behalf. MARY BARTON."

What did this mean?

He read it over and over again. Who was Mary Barton? Was she the wife of his enemy? He had heard that he had deserted a wife not many months ago in Colorado or somewhere, but what was she doing here?

What valuable testimony could she give in his behalf—what could she possibly know in regard to the murder of Josephine Cranston?

The more he thought of it the more he was puzzled to account for it. But he finally thrust it into an inside pocket, throwing the stone and string under his cot for some future need, perhaps.

Bright, fresh, full morning came, and with it a prison-fare breakfast. But Dick was used to rough food, and this did not turn his stomach, especially as he had not eaten anything for more than twenty-four hours, or, indeed, cared to.

But the whole day long he could not see the sheriff, who evidently kept out of his way purposely, and there was no means of communicating with the outside world. He wanted to employ a lawyer, but could not, and was kept in a spirit-breaking suspense day after day as to what was going on with-out or being done in his case.

Let us, however, return to Deadwood; leaving Dick to struggle on, friendless and alone, while Bill Barton was watching everything, and manipulating things to make sure of his revenge; not even daring to go to Deadwood until it had been obtained, for fear something might happen in his absence favorable to the prisoner.

Julia Barmore was prostrated at first, as has been shown, but she soon rallied and showed what sort of metal she was made of.

The first move was to call Dick's friends together, and tell them the story of poor

"Joe" Cranston, and the utter impossibility of Dick's murdering her from her standpoint. And then she urged them to get together, march to Ordway, and release him by force.

She soon found that she had great influence with those rough miners, and when she appealed to them with tears in her eyes, they took up her cause and Dick's with great enthusiasm, more especially as they knew what a bad one Bill Barton was.

"That is not all, my friends," said she. "You remember the duel they fought, and the hole that Dick shot in his ear? Well, you know that he swore to have revenge. Without doubt he murdered the poor girl, and is now trying to get his revenge on Dick by having him arrested for the crime."

"That thar's it. By thunder, gal, yer tork jus' like one of them law sharps," said Hank Hooker. "I know that he was goin' over ter his ranch to divide with his pard. He told me that you war sweet on Joe, an' that he didn't blame yer, but that he couldn't stan' it, an' was goin' ter clear out of this diggin's."

"Oh, I am sure he is innocent," said Julia. "All right, we'll get him out of this yar scrape, or get ourselves inter a wuss one," several of them replied.

And it was finally arranged that the men should get together the following day, and ride to Ordway.

They were desperately in earnest by this time, and when such men make up their minds to do a thing they generally do it.

But there was one traitor among them, Sid Smith, a gambler, fighter, and a bad one generally, a friend of Bill Barton, and naturally an enemy of Dick Trigger.

While pretending to be friendly to the movement for the rescue of Dick from the hands of his enemies, he secretly mounted his horse that night and set out for Ordway for the purpose of warning Barton and the sheriff of the proposed rescue.

"Is that so?" asked Barton, after he had learned all about the movement.

"Yes, and they'll be here to-morrow."

"How many of them?"

"At least fifty."

"All right, we'll spoil that little game," said Barton, firmly.

"How?"

"Why, we'll lynch him before they get here," he replied.

"Do you think it can be done?"

"Yes, the sheriff is my friend, and will not seriously oppose the movement, especially if he finds that there is a movement on foot to take the prisoner from him. I will see him at once."

"Well, you'd better."

He found Sheriff Maddern, and told him of the coming rescuing party from Deadwood, composed of Dick's friends.

"Well, we'll fight 'em off, that's all," said the sheriff, calmly. "That snap has been tried on me often before."

"But I have a better scheme."

"What is it?"

"Wait until the crowd reach the outskirts of the place, and I will attack the jail with a law and order gang (fearing of course that the course of justice is about to be thwarted), and after a sham resistance on your part, and you can pretend that you were taken by surprise, we will take him out and hang him to the nearest tree. How's that?"

"But won't it look a little weak on my part? Everything must look honest, you know."

"Certainly. You must keep quiet, and leave the whole business to me. I'll fix it," said Barton.

"All right. I don't care how soon he is off my hands, and I'd just like to disappoint that Deadwood gang anyhow."

"Now you keep in the background, and see how neatly I will work it, for the Game-cock of Deadwood, as they call him, must never escape hanging. I'd sooner lose my right hand than have him escape me after all that has been done," and away he rushed to gather his friends and fellow-gamblers.

At this time there were a large number of gamblers in Dakota, their principal headquarters being at Bismarck, Ordway and Deadwood; indeed, the whole Northwest was infested by them, as they always infested all mining districts.

And a bad lot they were. They were even worse than the Sioux Indians in many respects. Indeed, some of the worst crimes ever committed in Dakota were instigated by

these gamblers and carried out by Brave Bear, one of the worst savages that ever lived, but recently made a "good Indian" of by the process of hanging, it being claimed that the only good Indians are dead ones.

It happened that Brave Bear was skulking about Ordway at this time, and Barton took him into his "law and order party." But after all, he was quite as much a representative of law and order as were any of the others of his gang.

He was sent out to watch the coming of the party from Deadwood, while the others made preparations to carry out Barton's fiendish designs.

The wily Indian murderer knew his business well, and towards evening returned to Ordway with the intelligence that they were coming.

Then it became time to act. Barton scattered his followers about the place, and set them to talking and telling exaggerated stories regarding the coming band of avengers from Deadwood, and urging everybody to come out and either drive them back or hang the prisoner before they could get a chance to rescue him.

But the better class of the miners and citizens took little or no stock in the matter, finding that nearly every one who was actively engaged in it was a blackleg who cared nothing whatever for law and order.

They had suffered much at the hands of these fellows, and they naturally suspected that there was something under the business other than a love of law and order, so with few exceptions they refused to join in the affair at all.

"Let 'em fight if they want ter," said one citizen, and he was a representative man. "It'll be dorg eat dorg, anyway, an' can't hurt decent society much, anyway."

This chagrined Bill Barton very much, for his object was to create a general uprising so as to hide his own hand in the business, but he was not to be thwarted at this stage of the game so long as he had so many followers.

So he gathered them at the tavern, and from there marched in a body to the jail, each man armed for almost any emergency.

Sheriff Maddern was there with half a dozen men, just to make a show of defense, since he could but expect that the citizens would know that he must have heard of the business that was being talked of all over town.

He was standing at the gate of the high fence made of picketed upright logs, armed and seemingly ready, while his men were inside.

"What do you want here?" he demanded.

"We want that prisoner, Dick Trigger, the Deadwood murderer," replied Bill Barton.

"Well, you can't have him."

"I'll bet we will, an' you jus hold up yer hands, Mark Maddern," said one of the crowd.

"What do you want of my prisoner?"

"We want to hang him, for a crowd of his friends are coming from Deadwood to rescue him from the hands of the law," and then there were wild threats and loud clamorings among the crowd, that was fast becoming bloodthirsty.

"Gentlemen, this is all wrong."

"No, no. Give us the sucker, or it'll be all the wuss for you!" cried a gambler.

"No, no. Wait a minute, gentlemen, and let us talk this business over," said Maddern, acting his part in the matter finely.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Give us the keys or we'll take them from you by force!"

"Yes, an' give yer a cartridge pill besides, if yer don't hurry up."

"One moment, please, gentlemen," he pleaded, with seeming earnestness.

"And that might make it too late," said Barton.

"No; if these men are coming from Deadwood to attempt a rescue, let us all stand here and defend the jail."

"But they'll fight."

"Well, what of it? can't we fight back?"

"Yes, and perhaps lose a dozen good men on account of this murderous rascal. No, we must have him at once."

"Yes, yes!" roared the mob, and this time several hundred citizens had gathered on the scene to watch operations.

"Well, gentlemen, if you refuse to listen to reason, I shall have to defend myself and my prisoner the best I can," said he, pulling out his revolver with great deliberation.

"Oh, we've got our corn shellers, too," said

some one, and in an instant the sheriff was covered by at least fifty pistols.

It had ceased to be a farce any longer, for the roughs were getting terribly in earnest.

This parley could be distinctly heard by Dick Trigger in his cell, and he knew that his time had come. He was a trifle paler, but still resolute, not fearing to die, but hating to do so thus unavenged.

"Hold on!" cried Maddern, "I surrender."

This called forth a fiendish cheer.

"Here is the key, but you all witness that I only gave it up at the point of fifty muzzles."

"That's all right," said Barton, seizing the keys and rushing through the gate, closely followed by his friends, the guard inside of course understanding that the sheriff had surrendered, quietly making way.

"I'd give my life for a loaded single bar'led pistol—only a single bar'l," mused Dick, as he heard Barton thrust the key into the lock.

"There he is—there is the murderer!"

"Seize him!" and a wild rush was made towards Dick, who stood crouched at bay, as the door was thrown open.

But three of them measured their lengths upon the floor, before he was secured, by blows from Dick's fist, and they took no further interest in the proceedings just then.

But they finally secured and bound him, after which they placed a noose around his neck and started to leave the prison.

"Bill Barton, yer a coward, a coyote, or yer'd have this thing out with me personally," said Dick, glaring at the villain.

Barton uttered a mocking laugh, and then pointed to the hole in his ear.

"Away with him to the big cottonwood tree yonder!" said he, and, with demoniac shouts, they led the victim forth.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER THE COTTONWOOD TREE.

THE old cottonwood tree, where it was proposed to lynch Dick Trigger, stood on a knoll a short distance out of the town of Ordway, and thither they hurried him, with the fatal rope around his neck, followed by a mob, hooting and wild with excitement.

As yet there were no signs of the appearance of his friends from Deadwood, and, indeed, Dick knew nothing of their coming. All hope fled from his breast, and he only looked around to see if he could find a friendly acquaintance to whom he could intrust a message to Julia Barmore, but he saw none. He saw only angry, frowning, blood-thirsty looks all around him.

This was the hardest blow of all, but he had the heart to bear up under it.

In the meantime, the mysterious Mary Barton had learned of what was being arranged, and, mounting a pony, she set out to meet the party from Deadwood for the purpose of hurrying them up.

She met them about a mile away, going at only a comfortable pace, for the thought of immediate danger threatening their friend was out of the question with them.

The company was under the leadership of Buck McManus, who had been a friend of Dick's in the early days of Colorado. He had only arrived at Deadwood from a prospecting tour in the Black Hills the day before, but on hearing of his predicament, he instantly joined in the expedition for his rescue.

Buck was a reckless dare-devil of an Irishman, who had roved the world over, and was as brave as Dick himself, which fact made them fast friends. He was about fifty years of age, firm and grizzly, but as gentle as a kitten when not roused to anger.

When Mary Barton met the party, she startled them greatly by her story.

"Oh, ye devils!" cried Buck; "we'll save him or die wid him," and whipping up his horse, he dashed forward, followed by the others, leaving the friendly woman in the rear.

But she had directed them where to go, and was content to watch the result of her friendly act from a distance.

She was a young but careworn woman, across whose face it did not seem that a gleam of sunlight had ever flashed. But a closer look would convince a person that she had been once handsome and interesting. She appeared to be a stranger in those parts. At all events, none of the Deadwood party recognized her.

"Oh, I hope they will be in time to save

him!" said she, as she gazed after them through the cloud of dust which the horses raised. "It would spoil all my plans if they do not," she added, and then she followed slowly after them.

Meantime, Dick Trigger had been dragged to the fatal cottonwood tree, on whose gnarled branches many a man had been swung at the rude mandate of Judge Lynch.

The other end of the rope was thrown over a large limb, and six or eight men took hold of it to haul him up, when Barton (whom they recognized as a leader) should give the signal.

"Give him a chance to pray," suggested some one in the crowd, while the pinioned victim stood there as calm as a statue, not a muscle wavering, although he was a trifle pale.

"He pray!" sneered Barton.

"Yes; give him a chance!" cried several.

"Well, hurry up, then. But praying won't do him any good any more than it would the devil!" replied Barton, angrily.

"Wall, send for the parson then."

"No; we have no time for that."

"Hold thar, Bill Barton!" cried a big six-foot miner, breaking through the crowd with a big seven-shooter in his hand. "It strikes me as how yer a trifle fresh in this business. You've got awfully good all of a sudden, haven't yer?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Barton, angrily.

"I mean ter say that yer 'pear to be altogether too anxious to string that poor fellow up without givin' him a chance to enter a claim for diggin's in ther next world. Let him pray if he wants ter."

"Yes; give him a chance," said another, and not even the hardest of Barton's friends objected.

"Yes; les be sorter Christians 'bout our hangin's, so as not ter spile ther reputation of ther place," said the first objector.

"Well, hurry up!" cried Barton, impatiently.

But Dick never moved or seemed to hear what was going on. His mind was in Deadwood, mournfully dwelling upon the girl he loved.

"Arn't thar nobody har as can pray?" asked the six-foot miner, looking around. "Wal, this yar must be a God-forsaken place anyhow," he added, seeing no volunteers.

"Les sing 'Ole Hundred,'" suggested some one, and instantly fifty voices took up that grand old tune and sang a verse of it, out of both time and tune and in all sorts of ways, although there was much more solemnity than appropriateness in it.

But they had scarcely finished the first verse, when there came a rush and a cheer behind them, and the Deadwood party galloped suddenly upon them, yelling and firing upon the lynchers as they did so.

"Up with him!" shouted Barton, but as he spoke three of the men who had hold of the rope fell, and panic seized the others.

The avengers rode like a tornado and shouted like demons.

Buck McManus was in front, firing from two revolvers as he neared them.

The spectators broke and fled like sheep, and the lynchers were not slow in following.

One bullet struck Barton as he fled, giving him a bad wound in the leg, but it did not prevent his flight for cover, cursing from the bottom of his heart as he did so.

A wild cheer came from the victorious miners, and then a rush was made to free Dick Trigger from his bondage.

"Bad luck ter ther spalpeens! Are yees hurted, Dick, me ould friend?" asked Buck, riding back to where the others were at work cutting the cords which bound him.

"Not much. Why, Buck McManus, you here?" he asked, extending his benumbed hand.

"Faith, don't ye see me? Av coorse I'm here. Where the devil shud I be but fightin' for me friends? Bad luck ter 'em, but they nearly had yees up, so they did!"

"Yer right, Buck. That yar's ther nearest I ever come ter a hallelujah juba. Boys, I'm glad ter see yer. I thought as how yer wouldn't go clean back on me," he said, shaking hands with those who pressed eagerly around him.

"Oh, it warn't so much of our doin's as it war that gal o' yourn," said Hank Hooker.

"Julia, God bless her!"

"Wall, yer know we somehow didn't know. We got somehow mixed, for Bill Barton made it seem jus' like as how yer war

guilty, Dick; but that thar gal, she torked ter us, an' showed us how yer warn't guilty all ther time; then we ups an' rides for Ordway," said Hank, and then the others begged forgiveness in their rough style for ever believing him guilty.

"Begorra, if I'd a-been there, Dick, they'd niver have tuck yer," said Buck.

"Wall, it so happened, boys, that thar wasn't nobody at ther tavern that night, an' ther sheriff an' his men war disguised as miners, which took me clean off my guard," said Dick.

"That thar Bill Barton's a cuss," mused Hank.

"Yes, a murderous cuss."

"Let's arrest him."

"Yes, an' put him in jail."

"Yes, yes," was the general cry.

"All right," said Dick, "but let's go back to the jail for my pony an' pistols."

With another cheer they rode back to the jail, where the sheriff was only too glad to give up Dick's property. Indeed, he was afraid of his life, and there is no knowing what the indignant miners might have done to him had not Dick restrained them.

"Hold on, boys, we want ther sheriff ter take care of Bill Barton when we get him, but if he don't do so, we'll make it lively for him," said he.

"Certainly, gentlemen, I'll take good care of him if you bring him here," said the sheriff, as politely as he could.

"An' don't yer know it's yer duty ter arrest the dirty, murtherin' blackguard?" asked Buck.

"What for?"

"For murder, sure."

"Whose murder?"

"Joe Cranston, the one he accused me of murderin', blast his heart!" said Dick.

"Well, if there is any proof against him, why of course it becomes my duty to arrest him. But I thought you were going to bring him here?"

"So we are, if we can find him, but if we can't you must find him."

"Yer war ready enough to find me, warn't yer, jus' because yer had an old grudge agin me. But all right, I'll forgive yer if yer come up squar with him, for thar's more proof that he's the murderer than thar is agin me."

"Well, go through the town and see if you can find him. If you do, bring him here, and I'll see that he don't get away."

Thus assured, the mounted miners began to ride through the town, searching everywhere for the hiding villain.

But in the meantime Barton was locked in one of the cells of the jail; for knowing that the avengers would go for him, and perhaps lynch him with the very rope that had so nearly put an end to Dick Trigger, and also seeing that he could not depend on his followers, he made his way with all the haste he could to the jail, knowing it to be the safest hiding-place, and the one they would be the least apt to search for him.

Maddern sought him after the miners had gone away, and found him writhing with the wound he had received, and cursing his luck regarding Dick.

He told him, in as few words as could be, what had transpired; then asked him what he proposed to do.

"Dress this cursed wound the first thing," he replied, with an oath.

"And then what?"

"Remain right here until this thing blows over," he growled.

"And then?"

"Then we will see. Ten thousand curses on that fellow, he has escaped me!" he added.

"How did it happen? You had time enough it seems to me," mused the sheriff.

"Yes; but a few piety cranks put in their muzzles, and demanded time for him to pray. But of course a prayer would have choked him. Then the cursed fools went to singing a psalm tune, because there wasn't anybody there that could make a prayer; and while that was going on and we were waitin', up rode those Deadwood fools, and spoiled the whole business."

"What a pity!"

"Oh, but I shall get him yet; I'll stake my life on it," he added; and then, with the assistance of Maddern, he proceeded to dress the wound in his leg.

This was no easy thing to do, because it bled so freely; and they had scarcely finished the dressing before the avengers rode back to the prison, having of course failed to find

Barton anywhere, and after so informing the sheriff, they told him that they should hold him responsible if he was not arrested.

Maddern assured them that he would do his best to bring him to justice; and as this was the best that could be done, they all turned their horses' heads towards Deadwood.

Of course their coming and what they had done, as well as what they prevented being done, created great excitement in Ordway, and it was with much satisfaction that the citizens saw them ride out of the place.

But after all they had told the story of Bill Barton so well, and his connection with the murdered girl, that it created a strong impression among the better classes that he was really the girl's murderer, and this also accounted for his sudden virtue as a leader of the law and order party and his desire to hang Dick Trigger, so that the murder would be supposed to be avenged, and of this fact the sheriff was not slow to learn.

"You will have to get out of this locality without the loss of time, Bill," said he, after having been out among the people awhile.

"Why so?" demanded Barton, angrily.

"Because the people have taken a tumble."

"In what way?"

"Well, everybody is talking about the affair and nine out of ten of the influential people believe that you are the real murderer after all."

"The deuce you say!" said he, evincing considerable alarm.

"That's what they say, and I think it would be dangerous for you to be out to-night, for the stories that these Deadwood chaps have left behind them has set them to thinking. And, by the by, Bill, how near the truth those stories really are," added Maddern, coldly.

Barton looked up at him for an instant, and then bowing his head, seemed lost in thought.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HATE OF AN INJURED WOMAN.

As the Deadwood avengers rode out of Ordway they met, upon the outskirts, Mary Barton, who had ridden out to urge them forward at a greater speed, and by so doing saved Dick's life.

They all recognized her as she sat there, pale and haggard, upon her pony, and Dick was made aware of the facts.

"Sal, yer a good un," said he, riding up to her and offering his hand; "I'm a thousand times obliged to yer, ma'am—or be yer a miss, or what?"

"Never mind now what I am. Has Bill Barton escaped?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, he got away from us somehow. But ther sheriff'll hunt him up," said Dick.

"The sheriff will do nothing of the kind."

"He won't!"

"No, they are old friends—friends in crime—and he will sooner protect than arrest him. I overheard him tell Maddern that he murdered the girl, but that he was bound to have you hang for it to avenge that hole in his ear."

"Yer did! Boys, der yer hear that yer?" he asked, turning to his friends, who had halted and gathered around.

"How is it?" they asked.

"She heard Barton say as how he killed poor Joe," said Dick.

"Yes, I happened to be where I could overhear a conversation between him and Sheriff Maddern, and in explaining that he wanted to have Dick Trigger arrested on the charge of murder—just for personal revenge—he admitted that he had killed her after she had made herself known and denounced him."

"That thar settles it," they all said.

"Now what d'yer think?"

"I think I'm goin' ter have that thar cuss before he's much older," said Dick.

"And I will assist you," said the woman.

"But yer won't say who yer are?"

"Not now."

"Whar are yer goin' now?"

"To Deadwood first."

"All right, come right along with us; we'll take care of yer, yer bet!" said Dick, and again they resumed their journey, Dick riding alongside of the strange woman, and trying to find out something about her.

Finally she asked:

"Did you receive a letter in jail that was thrown through the grating of your cell window?"

"I did," said he, quickly, and at once pulled it from his pocket. "Here it is."

"Well, there need be no further secrecy between us on that point. I wrote that letter, and attaching it to a string and a small stone, I threw it in at your window," said she.

"Yer did!" he exclaimed.

"I did."

"An' then yer name's Mary Barton," said he, with much earnestness.

"God help me, it is!" and as she spoke she bowed her head in sorrow.

"An' this yar war the evidence yer had ter give in my behalf?"

"It was. But when I wrote it I did not expect such an ending of your case. I wrote it to assure you that you had an unknown friend who possessed evidence in your favor, in case you were brought to trial on the charge of that murder. He has triumphed, and so have you."

"How's that?"

"Why, he has escaped, and so have you. In case you are never brought to trial, my evidence would be worth nothing. But when I learned that you were to be lynched so to make sure of his being revenged, I did what I could to bring about your rescue," said she.

"An' for which I thank yer very much. But how is it that yer name's Barton?"

"Well, I'm his cast-off wife," said she, sadly.

"What! Wal, hang me if I didn't half think so all ther while," said Dick.

"But please do not let it be known. I would rather be known as Mary Hill, my maiden name, for the present."

"I'll protect yer in it, Mrs. Barton."

"Oh, please do not call me by that name again. I detest it. Two years ago he won my affections, and we were married. My father had just died at Denver, leaving me quite a fortune. It was that fortune he was after. Through my weakness he managed to get it, and then he abandoned me, almost in poverty. I soon learned that he had a former wife living, and then my heart became fired for revenge. I have followed him until now, and God only knows how long I shall be obliged to follow him until I help justice to overtake him."

"Lady, I've sworn my life agin that rascal's, an' I'm with yer heart an' hand ter bring him right up ter ther bull-ring."

"But to think that he should escape when the chances were so favorable for his capture," said she, regretfully.

"Oh, we'll have him yet. When ther devil catches a fish he sometimes plays with him, an' gives him lots of line afore he lands him, ma'am."

"But he is very cunning."

"Not so cunning as the Old Boy is, who has surely got him on his hook," replied Dick.

"I hope not."

And thus they conversed, riding along in the rear of the company, until they reached the outskirts of Deadwood.

Here, however, things changed somewhat, for on nearing the camp, the men became almost wild with delight at the thought of returning victorious, and they rode helter-skelter towards Bed Rock Tavern, to impart the good news to Julia Barmore and old Yank Butts.

Even Dick himself became excited, and rode away from Mrs. Barton, urging his pony on at top speed, so anxious was he to see Julia.

That was a memorable night for Bed Rock Tavern, for never in its history was there such a crowd there, and never were the resources of Yank Butts' larder called on so heavily.

The meeting between Dick Trigger and Julia Barmore can better be imagined than described, but the woman who had befriended him found a warm place in that tavern and in the heart of that devoted girl.

But still the question remained unanswered—what was to be done with Bill Barton, for by this time no one doubted his guilt.

Buck McMannus and a few others were for starting out a fresh expedition to scour the country for him, but Dick Trigger finally prevailed upon them to let the whole business remain in his hands for the present, as the cause was more his own than anybody else's, and it was agreed to after talking over the subject for some time.

"Boys, he's the Game-cock of Deadwood,

an' he'll come out all right, never fear," said Hank Hooker.

"An' don't yer forget it," was the echo.

That night nearly all of the miners and friendly ranchers returned to their homes, leaving Dick and his friend McMannus almost the sole occupants of Bed Rock Tavern, aside from the regular family.

McMannus retired early to bed, being very tired, but Dick and Julia remained in the sitting-room together until quite late, talking over the sensations of the past few days.

Jumping Jim and Hallelujah Jane, the colored servants, remained up attending to their duties, and naturally enough they conversed upon the most exciting topic.

"Why didn't you go 'long wid 'em, Jim?" asked Jane, who delighted in teasing him.

"Go 'long wid who?" he asked, looking up from his work.

"Why, wid de rescuers?"

"Wall, now, you know dat I try ter get Marser Butts ter let me go, and he wouldn't."

"Wha' fo' he not let you go?"

"Wal, he tuk me confidentially out in de barn, an' he say: 'Jim, de tavern mus' be protected, an' if all de brave fellows go off, how I know wha' happen? No,' he say, 'you stay heah wid me, Jim, an' we will defend de place agin all de Injins dat come 'long.'"

"Injins! Wha' Injins come 'long?"

"Wha' Injins! Am it possible dat you am so far in de background ob human observance dat you didn't know dat Brave Bear an' his tribe ob red scaliwags am'spected ter swoop down on de diggin's any moment?" he asked, looking at her as though sorry for her ignorance.

"No, who tole you dat?" she asked, evidently more moved than she cared to show.

"Why, we heah 'bout it yesterday mornin'."

"Goodness me!"

"An' fo' dat reason Massa Butts didn't want me fo' ter leabe him," said Jim, with much pomposity.

"Wha' he do wid you, eh?"

"Why, keep me fo' ter help proteck de place. Wha' you think?"

"Wha' place?"

"Dis yer place, to be shuah—wha' place you fink?" he asked, indignantly.

"Wal, I didn't know but he wanted de under side ob de barn protected," said she, laughing convulsively.

"Oh, you go 'long wid you'self! You think you's mighty smart, don't you, jus' cos you fine me under de barn one night looking for hens' eggs."

"But how funny it war dat you look fo' dem in de night time! Yal yal yal!"

"Wal, didn't I 'splain dat?"

"No; yers only lied."

"What am dat you say?" he demanded.

"Dar was shootin' goin' on an' I foun' you crawlin' under de barn."

"Fo' hens' eggs," he said, emphatically, at which she laughed all the heartier. "Din' I 'splain ter you dat I see better in de dark dan I do in de daytime?"

"Oh, go 'way, fool nigger! Same way when I foun' you in the de meat chest."

"Wal, what I dar fo'?" he demanded.

"Cos dar war a fight gwine on 'mong de miners, I calculate, honey."

"Go 'way wid you hifalutin'! You's got too much 'magination. I war in dar huntin' fo' my jack-knife dat I lose," said he, with great emphasis.

"Oh, you makes me tired!" exclaimed Hallelujah Jane, disgustedly.

"Wal, I wish you would get tired of your nonsense or I leab de place."

"Wish you would, den boss get somebody dat got some smart to him. I's tired ob you. You's no good nohow."

"All right; you wait till dem Injuns come an' see 'f I's no good. Dat's all right, Jane, you hab heap of fun wid me, but when you wants a strong arm fo' ter proteck yer, whar am yer den, hey?"

"I'd be all broke up if I lean on you. No, I'd hab nuffin' but de gospil ter fall back on," said she, seriously.

"Much good dat would do yer wid de wile Injuns whoopin' 'round."

"Wal, I take chances 'tween you and de gospil, an' go ten better on de gospil ebry time," said she, laughing heartily.

"Hark! Wah dat?" he suddenly asked, starting up.

"Wha'?" she asked, looking frightened.

"Din you heah dat noise?"

"No, wha' wur it like?"

"Like somebody creepin' round de house."
 "Oh, Lord! maybe it am dem Injuns, Jim. Go out and see if de boss am out dar."

"Go out you'self."
 "Don' you see dat I am busy?"
 "Amn't I busy, too?"

"But can't you jus' look out in de bar-room an' see if it wurn't him dat war makin' de noise?" she said, pettishly.

"Wal, I s'pose I can if you's such a big coward dat you can't take a look out ob de room," said he.

Jim opened the door cautiously that led into the bar-room—really the largest room in the house—but the landlord had retired and the place was dark as midnight.

"Dar am nobody dar," he said, shutting the door quickly.

Jim didn't look exactly peaceful.

"Who make dat noise?"

"Dunno. 'Spect it war dem Injuns," said he, and believing that it might be, his teeth began to chatter, and he evidently wished that he could get under the barn or into the meat chest.

But the barn was several rods away, and the meat chest too full to admit his body, so he was obliged to stand on his own bottom.

"Hark!" said Jane, in a whisper, and this made Jim dance around wildly.

"Wa—wa—"

"Dar am somebody roun' dis yer house, an' I am shuah ob it. Let's put out de light!" she said in a stage whisper.

"Oh, whar am Dick Trigger and Buck McMannus?"

"Up-stairs ter bed," said she, as she turned down the light and finally blew it out.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed, as he suddenly found himself in the dark.

"Wha' am de matter wid you, Jim?"

"I—I hadn't got my pistols wid me," said he, as though that would have made any difference, and then they both squat down and listened.

But there could be no mistake about it, there was more than one individual prowling stealthily around the tavern.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MIDNIGHT SURPRISE.

HISTORY informs us that the cackling of a molested goose once saved Rome, but it was evidently a white goose.

And in almost a like way the cackling of two terrified black geese saved Red Rock Tavern and its inmates.

Jumping Jim and Hallelujah Jane, two black servants at the tavern, happened to be the last ones up at the tavern, for the excitement attending the return of the Deadwood avengers, who had gone to the rescue of Dick Trigger from the hands of his enemies, had kept them from finishing their work till late into the night.

And while chaffing each other on their individual bravery, as they invariably did when left alone to talk over any sensational occurrence, they heard the footsteps of prowlers around the premises.

Jim had just been boasting of his prowess in a fight, and she had been ridiculing the idea, but when they both became satisfied that something wrong was going on about the place they blew out the light and crept trembling into different corners of the kitchen.

Presently somebody tried the latch of the outer door, and they both went almost to pieces there in the dark.

"Jim, go up-stairs and tell de folks," whispered Jane, from her corner.

"No; you go, Janey, there's a good gal. I'se got to go fo' my pistols," said Jim.

"I cannot fin' de way. You kin see in de dark; you go."

"Hahn't I got fo' to stay heah an' proteck de place? You go, honey."

"Hark! dey am tryin' fo' ter get in der bar-room! Oh, Lord! if I could only see fo' ter read der Scriptor now!" and utterly overcome she started to creep toward the door on all fours.

"Am you goin', honey?"

"Yes, I am goin'."

"Well, I'll have ter go, too, for my pistols am up-stairs," said he, in a whining tone, and so he followed her, also on all fours, as she made her way to the stairs leading to the top of the little two-story tavern.

Once out of immediate danger, fancied or real, they both became more bold, and going

to the door of the room occupied by Dick and Buck, they called them from their sleep.

"Dick! Dick! dar am Injuns roun' de place!" said Jim, in a strange whisper.

"What's that, yer say?" asked Dick, rousing from a beautiful dream.

"Dar am Injuns roun' heah!"

"Fut the devil's that?" asked McMannus, rousing up, and Jim repeated the warning, while Jane made her way in the dark to the room occupied by the landlord and his wife.

"Wait a minute," said Dick, now partially aroused, leaping from his bed and going stealthily toward the window.

"Fut is it, Dick?" asked McMannus.

The house was now perfectly dark, and Dick was making a careful observation. Finally he returned to his friend.

"Buck, I don't know what's up, but there's several suspicious-lookin' cusses prospectin' round here. Ther moon's just risin'—come and see what yer make out on 'em, pard," said Dick.

Bold Buck McMannus crept softly to the window.

"Begorra, but there's Injuns," said he.

"But what the deuce are they doing here?"

"Thavery, most likely."

"Hold on; let's watch them a little," said Dick, carefully looking from the window.

Just then Mr. Butts, the landlord, came in.

"Dick—are you here?" he asked, groping his way in the dark and clutching a revolver.

"Yes; what do you make of it?" asked Dick.

"I do not know, only I am sure that I can make out Brave Bear among them."

"Brave Bear! Then that settles it," said Dick.

"How?"

"Settles what?" asked McMannus.

"Why, don't you know that Brave Bear is in the employ of Bill Barton? I'll bet my pile that they're here after me."

"Begorra, but that's good," said Buck, going for his pistols and cartridge belt.

"Hush! Watch close, pop, an' point out that red cuss to me. I want ter vaccinate his devilish skull with a 44. Thar's five hundred reward fer him, anyhow."

"Hark! They are trying to get in at the bar-room door!" said Butts.

"Wait three shakes, an' give me a chance at them," said Dick, eagerly.

The room they occupied was almost directly over the bar-room, and, looking out, they saw about twenty savages prowling about, while a few were trying to force an entrance.

"Go in dar, Jim!" whispered Jane, but Jim was safely ensconced beneath Dick's bed, yet he whispered back:

"I'se looking for my pistol."

Dick Trigger leaned cautiously out of the window, so as to get a good shot, and he startled the silence and one Indian as he fired.

Thus broke in upon, the prowling redskins darted to cover, not quick enough, however, to escape a shot from McMannus and Landlord Butts, both of whom brought down their game.

But no sooner had the Indians gained cover than they opened fire upon the window from which the shots had come upon them, and both glass and sash suffered.

Dick and McMannus at once flew to another room with a window facing the scene of hostilities, and there, waiting for some moments, they were enabled to get each another shot at the rascals.

This sort of business proved too much for the prowlers, and they soon withdrew, although watch for them did not cease until daylight, when Jumping Jim came forth from under the bed as bold as a lion.

He flourished a pistol and was anxious to know if any of the Indians yet remained.

"Wha' am de matter wid you, I'd like ter know?" sneered Hallelujah Jane.

"I isn't satumfied yet; I wants mo' blood," replied Jim, flourishing his pistol.

"Wal, better crawl under de bed dar an' see if you can't fine some."

"Wha' you mean, honey?"

"Wha' you do under dat bed when de fight in war gwine on, tell me dat?"

"Why, I jus' crawl under dar to fine my pistol, dat's all."

"Yas, an' it took yer mighty long while ter fine it, didn't it?" she sneered.

"But it war dark under dar."

"Dark! thought dat yer could see better in de dark. Bahl better go out ahine de barn an' shoot you'self."

"De boss can't spar' me in dese yere troublesome times, honey," replied Jim, sweetly.

"Go'way dar, fool nigger. Much good you do whar dar war any danger," and in supreme disgust for her fellow servant, she turned away to make preparations for breakfast.

Meantime the other men had been out to examine the dead Indians.

Yes, three were dead and two badly wounded, but unfortunately, Brave Bear was not among them. That red fiend seemed to lead a charmed life for years.

From one of the wounded ones Dick obtained the facts of the case, proving, as he suspected, that Brave Bear had been employed by Bill Barton to follow the party to Deadwood and capture him if possible, after which he was to take him to Swift Run, where he would meet him with his party of disappointed lynchers.

"Thar it is, pards. But this thing's got ter be worked out," said Dick, firmly.

"No, no, let's go away from this dreadful place!" cried Julia Barmore, who felt as though she could stand no more of the bloody scenes which had followed each other in such rapid succession since her arrival.

"Why, gal, yer wouldn't have me weaken, would yer?" asked Dick, taking her hand.

"Oh, this horrid, horrid place! There has been nothing but fightings, shootings, and most revolting murders since I came here. I want to leave the place forever, and go back again to civilization," she replied, bitterly.

"Wall, I'm awfully sorry too, Julia, but what am I ter do? Ther fights has all been forced on me. I never pick a quarrel, but now that I'm in it, I'm goin' ter come out or go under. I'm goin' a-gunnin' for that thar rascal, an' if he don't get ther drop on me, I'll avenge that thar poor gal's death."

"An' begorra, I'm wid yees!" said Buck.

"Of course you are, ole pard; an' we'll be doin' a public duty in wipin' that thar varmint out of the diggin's."

"True for yees Dick."

"But what do you propose to do?" asked Mr. Butts, the landlord.

"Take ther trail for Swift Run right after breakfast. But I say, where's Mrs. Barton?" he asked, not seeing her.

"That's so; I had forgotten her," said Mrs. Butts, starting up-stairs.

"Wall, it's sorter queer that she hasn't shown up while all this has been goin' on," mused Dick.

"That's so," they all said, and then waited for the landlady to return.

"Why, she isn't in her room," said she, looking somewhat puzzled.

"Not in her room!"

"Wall, maybe she's somewhar round; let's take a look," replied Dick; and for the next five minutes the place was searched thoroughly, without getting any trace of her.

But the strangest thing happened to be that her pony was in the barn.

There was no trace of her anywhere, and she might have gone for a stroll somewhere; and so they waited awhile longer.

But a new idea seemed to strike Dick. Had she not by some means been abducted by Barton's Indians? Had he not discovered her identity, and did he not wish to get her in his hands?

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE TRAIL TO SWIFT RUN.

ACTING on this impulse, Dick Trigger went to the wounded Indian whom he had got his other information from, and who, with his fellow, had in the meantime been cared for and made comfortable.

He knew a little Sioux and the Indian knew a little English, and so he asked him if Brave Bear had carried off a woman.

But the redskin did not appear inclined to answer the question, even if he could do so, and Dick brought the cold argument of a revolver muzzle close up to his cheek.

"Tell me the truth, or off goes that dirty head of yours!" said he.

This proved to be the right sort of an inducement, as Dick felt sure that it would be, and the Indian at once confessed that Brave Bear had carried off the woman.

He said she came out of the house to learn probably what was going on, and that Brave Bear, seeing that he could not capture Dick Trigger, had seized the woman and smothered her cries, had borne her away, thinking that it was Julia Barmore, the young lady he hoped to possess himself of.

"Is there any bounds to that man's rascality?" said Landlord Butts.

"No, and he's got a fine pard in, Brave Bear."

"Oh, what an escape I had," said Julia, white with fear and excitement.

"You have, indeed, my dear niece, but think of that poor woman."

"Yes, yes, I am so sorry for her."

"But she's his cast-off wife, an' if them devils take her to him, he'll murder her sure, just because they didn't get either you or me."

"Oh, it is dreadful!"

"But hurry up that breakfast, Butts, an' we'll take ther trail right off. We'll stop an' get Hank Hooker an' some of ther other boys, an' maybe we can overtake ther red devils."

In a moment all was hurry and bustle about the place. Jim was rubbing off the horses, while Jane was flying around at a lively rate, and Dick and Buck were preparing to take the trail.

Swift Run is about five miles north of Deadwood, on the trail leading to Fort Abraham Lincoln, and thither they started, stopping at several miners' ranches, and finally half a dozen of them, well armed and mounted, were on the way.

"Dat's what it am to be a black man," said Jim, after the party had gone.

"Wha' am de matter wid you now?" asked Jane, glancing angrily at him.

"Oh, nuffin, only 'cos I war only a nigger dey wouldn't hab me go 'long," and you certainly would have thought he felt hurt.

"Wha' dey wan' ob you, hey?"

"Ter help ter fight dem Injuns, ob co'se."

"You fight Injuns! You couldn't fight a dung-hill rooster. Go 'long!"

"Didn' I wan' fo' ter go?"

"I didn' heah yo' say nuffin 'bout it."

"Wal, dat's whar yo's dead wrong, like de mos' ob yer sex. I axed Dick fo' ter let me go 'long, an' he said I'd hab ter stay heah an' help de boss protec' de females."

"Yo' protec'! Yo' wouldn' protec' yo'se'f. Yo'd crawl under de barn or under de bed at de fus' danger," and the old wench laughed loud enough to be heard a mile.

This rather took the comb off. He could not make much headway with Jane in boasting of his prowess, and so he flattened out and subsided.

The parting between Dick and Julia had been a painful one, for she had it in her mind that she should never see him alive again, and this alone would have daunted a man with less resolution. But he laughed at her fears, kissed her, and rode away.

For two or three miles they rode along without finding any evidences of the Indians whom they were pursuing, but finally the trail became very fresh, and they at once caught on to it.

"Now, boys, we've got ter use some of Ole Nick's cunnin' here. We don't know how many of his gang this cuss has got along with him, an' so we must lay low," said Dick.

"Them's sartin sure," said Hank Hooker, "but you want ter keep out of sight, Dick."

"Why do I?"

"'Cos you're ther cuss he's arter."

"An' he's ther cuss I'm arter; so why should I lay low, pard?"

"Wall, you wur jus' torkin' 'bout Ole Nick's cunnin', wan't yer?"

"Yes."

"Wall, that's some of it. You just lay low an' let us uns prospect a bit."

"All right, Hank. Yer no slouch."

"Not much, only with gals," replied Hank, who could not forget that he had fixed himself up in his stunningist to captivate Julia Barmore on the day of her arrival at Bed Rock Tavern, and that handsome Dick Trigger had gone to the front ahead of him.

But in the meantime they did not overtake Brave Bear and his band, as they had intended or hoped to do, but he arrived at the rendezvous about half an hour ahead of them.

The place of meeting seemed to be well understood between the Indian chief and Bill Barton, for they met in that wild locality without the slightest trouble.

But when Barton found that the chief had failed to bring with him either Dick Trigger or Julia Barmore, his rage was terrible, for so at first he understood it, and began to abuse Brave Bear in the wildest manner.

"Pale face too fast—too hot," said Brave Bear, after listening to his abuse for awhile.

"Why so? Didn't you promise me that

you would bring Dick Trigger to me here?" demanded Barton, savagely, toying with the butt of his revolver at the same time.

"But the watchful devil discovered us, and I have left five of my men behind who fell by his revolver."

"Curses on him!"

"But I have brought the white squaw."

"What! you have brought Julia Barmore to me?" he exclaimed, with intense excitement. "Where is she?"

"Yonder, under guard."

"Bring her to me instantly!"

Brave Bear turned and rode away on his pony. He was quite as brave and devilish as was Bill Barton, but there was something in the white man that commanded the respect and obedience of the wily chief, and so he did his bidding like a slave.

"Julia Barmore! Well, well, that is almost as good as getting possession of Dick Trigger," he chuckled to himself. "Where is the Gamecock of Deadwood now? Ha, ha, ha! I have got his pullet at all events. And the revenge I may fail in getting on him I may—nay, will get on the girl he loves. Ah! I will yet make her love this hole in my ear—this mark for life that her lover gave me. Yes, yes, she shall caress it! Might is right in this world, or at least it is so out in this territory. Ah! here comes the fair Julia!" he added, as he saw Brave Bear and two of his fellows riding toward him, with a female seated on another pony between them.

"Ugh! Brave Bear bring white squaw," said the chief, presenting the captive to Barton.

"Great God! whom have you brought me?" asked Barton, excitedly.

"Brave Bear bring white squaw."

"Curse you and your white squaw!" said he, between his clenched teeth.

"William Barton!"

"Well?"

"Why am I brought here?"

"Blamed if I know. Why are you here?"

"I was captured and brought here by brute force, only to meet a brute!" said she, bitterly.

"Where were you?"

"At Bed Rock Tavern."

"And this accursed fool made the mistake of bringing you here—"

"Instead of Miss Julia Barmore."

"Well, what business have you in these diggings, anyhow? How came you here?"

"I came in search of my husband."

"Bah!"

"Who does not wish to see me?"

"Well, I guess that is about the measure of it. But why have you followed me? Are you such a fool as not to know when a man has got enough of you?"

"A man never deserts his wife, especially after he has robbed her of a fortune left to her by her father," said she, bitterly.

"Oh, give us a rest! I thought I had given you a shake that you could not mistake."

"So you did, but I followed you for another purpose, Bill Barton."

"Oh, you did! Well, what was it?"

"Revenge!"

"Indeed. So you have followed me these hundreds of miles for revenge, have you?" he asked, mockingly.

"I have."

"Well, how do you expect to get it?"

"By denouncing you to the law."

"Bosh! there is no law in Dakota."

"There may be more than you know of."

"What do you mean, woman?"

"There is lynch law here."

"Lynch law?"

"Yes, the same that you tried to work on brave Dick Trigger the other day," said she.

"What?"

"Oh, I know all about it."

"Brave Dick Trigger, eh?"

"Yes, a man as brave as you are infamous!" she fairly hissed.

"Woman, beware of your language!"

"I only speak the truth."

"You simply lie, you wench!"

"I have proof that I do not."

"What proof?"

"Your own words."

"To whom?"

"Mark Maddern."

"What! When?"

"When you were arranging for the arrest of Dick Trigger on a false charge of murder."

"Wench!" and he half-pulled his revolver from his belt.

"Oh, shoot me—murder me as you murdered Josephine Cranston, your old love!" said she, bracing boldly up to him.

"What risks a woman will take when she wants to get even by talking back!"

"What do you mean?" he asked, growing considerably paler.

"Simply that you murdered that poor girl, and tried to have Dick Trigger hung for it."

"You are a liar!"

"I am not. I heard you tell Mark Maddern so while planning Dick's arrest. Oh, you may frown, but you do not frighten me."

"What do you want, anyway?"

"Justice."

"What do you call it?"

"My fortune back again. I was weak and foolish enough to love you once, but now I am strong enough to demand my rights."

"Bah! you have no rights."

"Well, then, I have a cause for revenge."

"How will you get it?"

"By denouncing you as a murderer."

"You dare not!"

"Why not?"

"Because you must know that you would never live to do so."

"I do not care to live—only for one thing. If I cannot get justice I will have revenge," said she, fiercely.

"Woman, fiend, or whatever you are, in your tramp for revenge, has it ever occurred to you that I have the power of squelching you?" he asked, again handling his pistol.

"Of course it has; once a murderer, always a murderer," she retorted.

"Do you intend to persist in this?"

"I do."

"Very well. Brave Bear!" he called, at the same time motioning to the Indian chief, who stood but a few yards away.

The rascally red approached.

"Do you want a pale-faced squaw?"

"Yes," said he, eagerly.

"Take this one. I give her to you."

"Good!" and the savage approached her.

"Back, rascal!" cried the woman, drawing a pistol and pointing it at his head.

But almost instantly one of the other Indians snatched the weapon from her.

"That is all right. Take her, Brave Bear, and if she is ugly, why, kill her. You know how such things are done, eh?"

"Me big chief—me like white squaw. Come with me to my wigwam!" said he, again approaching her.

She allowed him to come quite close to her, and then snatching a hunting-knife from his belt, she struck him an almost mortal blow, which for the moment staggered him.

But, notwithstanding this, the burly brute caught her in his arms while his followers disarmed her of the knife, and Barton laughed as he saw the struggling woman borne away.

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNEXPECTED SHOT.

It will be remembered that Dick Trigger and his party were not far behind Brave Bear and his Indians when they arrived at Swift Run, where he had agreed to meet Bill Barton.

Also, that they had Mary Barton a captive, mistaking her for Julia Barmore, whom he had ordered him to bring provided he could not abduct Dick Trigger, whom he had sworn to lynch.

The altercation between husband and abused wife had ended in Barton's handing her over to Brave Bear as a gift, and he was on the point of carrying her off to his wigwam when a volley of shots rang out, and Bill Barton was one of the first to throw up his hands and fall to the ground.

Three of the Indians and two of Barton's friends, who stood a little ways in reserve, shared the same fate, while the others, both Indians and whites, took to their heels and were soon out of sight.

Dick Trigger was quickly upon the scene, and to make sure that the arch rascal was done for, he emptied seven barrels of his revolver into his body.

"Who is the Gamecock of Deadwood now?" he asked, bending over the writhing villain.

"Dick Trigger," said he, faintly, and he never said anything more.

Hank Hooker and several others chased Brave Bear and his fellow-rascals for some distance, but the good fortune that had ever attended him enabled him to keep out of

reach of their pistols, and so once more he escaped.

Mrs. Barton turned from the horrible picture; but when she hid her face in her hands for a moment, it was not to mourn for the villain who had so terribly abused and misused her, but to shut out the bloody sight.

"Boys, my old pard's avenged—poor Joe Cranston's avenged!" said Dick, pointing to the dead body of Bill Barton.

"That's so; Dick," said Hank Hooker, "an' I'm a darned good mind to give him one more for luck."

"No, Hank, my leads did ther business for ther rascal; that's enough."

"Wal, I guess yer right 'bout that. He looks as though he'd got all he wanted."

"Mrs. Barton, yer ride back ter Bed Rock Tavern, an' we'll soon foller yer. This is no place for yer jus' now," said Dick, going to where she sat upon a rock and speaking kindly to her: "Take my pony an' I'll take one of ther others, for thar's several here that's got no riders."

Without a word the woman obeyed and started on her way back to the tavern.

Turning then to examine the dead, they found ample evidence of Barton's intentions regarding the fate of Dick Trigger, for in his hand, even clutched in death, there was a rope with which he had intended to hang him. But that hanging never took place.

They took the weapons belonging to the fallen ones, after which they buried them in a trench together, covering the spot with large stones to prevent the wild animals from glutting upon the bodies, and then they rode away back to Deadwood, each man of them feeling that the world was rid of a villain.

Indeed, they found, on their return to Deadwood, that there was general rejoicing at Barton's death, coupled with regrets that Brave Bear had not shared his fate.

After receiving the congratulations of all hands, Dick sought Mrs. Barton, who had already given Julia Barmore and Mrs. Butts an account of the affair, and handed her a large leather wallet.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Wal, I haven't looked inter it, marm, but whatever it is, it belongs to the widder of Bill Barton, and so does this yer gun," he added, handing her the pistol that had belonged to Barton.

She held it in her hands a moment without speaking, and then, after her face had been swept by an expression of pain, she cautiously unclasped the pocket-book.

There were nearly a thousand dollars in United States greenbacks, but this did not seem to interest her much, although it was but a portion of what he had robbed her of.

Besides this there were several letters and memorandums, two of which were plans for robberies, which he and other gamblers had resolved upon. Indeed, everything showed what a rascal he was!

And one of the letters was from a woman in Bismarck, addressing him as husband, and reproaching him for desertion. This was only one more evidence of his rascality.

"Well, he married me first, and I claim this as a trifle saved from the wreck of a small fortune left me by my father, although I do not know what has become of the title to the mine," said she, finally.

"That may yet be traced," said the landlord, who had been looking on.

"Yes; get one of them legal sharps up in Bismarck, or somewhere, an' he'll untangle ther knot," said Dick.

"I will do as you say, Mr. Trigger, for you have been a good friend of mine so far."

"Wal, I'm a good friend ter anybody as is abused, I reckon; leastways I want ter be," and he sauntered out into the bar-room again, where a dozen or more of his friends were gathered.

"Three cheers for the Gamecock of Deadwood!" shouted Hank Hooker, and they were given.

"Boys, that's all right, but I hope, now as my wust enemy is dead, an' my poor, dear little pard's revenged, that thar won't be no more casion for callin' me or anybody else ther gamecock. We're all gamecocks, so let's licker," he added, turning toward the bar.

"That thar suits my meat," said several.

"Begorra, but it must be a rough day's work when we forget our bitters," said Buck McMannus, laughing.

"That's so. Come, Butts, trot out yer cordial."

"Here you are, gentlemen."

"I say, Buck, give us your didger," said Dick, extending his hand to his old friend. "Buck, yer clean dust; I like yer. Grab that thar bottle an' guzzle!"

"Sure, I'll not argy wid yees on that point," replied Buck, helping himself liberally.

"Here's ter ole times."

"An' better new ones, begob."

"But I say, Buck, I haven't had a chance ter tork with yer much since we met, but how're yer fixed?" asked Dick, in his earnest way.

"Very much loike a gun that has neither lock, stock, nor barrel," replied the genial Irish adventurer, laughing.

"Then I guess you are not very dangerous," suggested the landlord.

"That I'm not."

"Busted?" asked Dick.

"I am."

"Der yer want ter locate?"

"Faith, I do, if it's not in a poor-house."

"Spit on it an' put it thar!" exclaimed Dick, extending his hand.

They shook hands heartily.

"I want a pard—my little ole pard's dead—but I—I— Well, Buck, I've got a good payin' claim, an' I don't want ter work it alone. What der yer say?"

"I'll help yees, Dick."

"An' come in as a pard?"

"I will."

"Then that settles it. Boys, yer all know 'bout my last pard—poor critter—poor gal! But that's all over with now, an' now Buck McMannus is my pard. Der yer hear?"

"Yes, yes! Whoop for Buck McMannus!" cried Hank Hooker.

"An', boys, he's a good un! I've known him for years, an' he's a good lead. He's paying arth from ther surface down. Buck, put it in thar once more."

"Begorra, I'll shake hands wid yees all day."

"In course yer will, for yer blanket wide, an' all wool. I've got a ranch an' all ther fixin's, an' we'll work ther ole claim fer all she's worth, an' when she stops panin' out ter pay, why, we'll move an' stake another claim—eh, Buck?"

"Sure, I'll go ther wuld over wid yees, Dick, an' yer know I wud. Drink wid me!"

"Of course I will, an' so will ther boys."

"Give us ther best ye've got, landlord?" said Buck, with some authority.

"Certainly, Mr. McMannus," said he, with much politeness, for the brave though broken fellow, who might have been but little thought of before, was now the partner of Dick Trigger, the Gamecock of Deadwood.

But the idea of there being any "best" in the landlord's drinks when his whole stock of liquors consisted of one cask of third rate whisky, was what might have made it laughable to an outsider or any one who stopped to think.

But it was all the same to those rough miners, one kind was as good as another, although the sociability of the act of drinking was more than the love they had for it.

Late in the afternoon Dick and his new partner started for the old ranch, not, however, before Dick had taken a fond leave of Julia Barmore, and made arrangements to have Mrs. Barton remain at the tavern until she could see her way clear to return to Colorado.

The other miners also prepared to return to their ranches, and Bed Rock Tavern seemed likely to be deserted for a while.

"Don't get lonesome, gally, I'll be up to see you agin in a few days," said he to Julia, as he mounted his pony. "I've been away from ther old ranch so long that things must be sorter moldy 'round thar. But once I get 'em inter workin' order agin, I'll come as often as yer want ter see me."

"Oh, that will be every day, Dick," said she, laughing and kissing her hand to him as he rode away, accompanied by McMannus, and he raised his hat to her gallantly as he whirled into the road leading down into the valley.

But it seemed as though Sunday had suddenly fallen upon Bed Rock Tavern when all the miners had departed, for there were left only Butts and his family.

As for Julia Barmore, she retired to her chamber to ponder over the sensational events that had transpired since her coming to the place and to ponder on the character of the man who had so completely won her heart.

But it was all the same old story, of course, for when a girl loves a man, he is always just

right in her estimation. So the pondering upon Dick Trigger's character in this instance only confirmed her belief, that he was the bravest and noblest man in the world.

Landlord Butts felt more at ease than he had for some time, and set about putting his place in better order than it had been for many a day, although, to tell the truth, he would much rather have seen some company about than to be so utterly deserted.

Jumping Jim and Hallelujah Jane, the colored servants, also felt the lack of company, and went droning about their work.

"Pears like peace war declar'd," suggested Jim, going into the kitchen where Jane was at work.

"Peace! piece ob what?" she asked, in her usually contemptuous way.

"Why, de peace ob de world."

"Go 'way, fool nigger! what you got to do wid peace, anyhow?"

"Don' be sassy, Jane!"

"Sassy! I thought as how you were a man ob war an' bloodshed."

"So I am, Jane—so I am. But don' yer know what de Bible says?"

"'Bout what?"

"'Bout plow-handles bein' casten inter swords and prunin' hooks."

"Oh, go 'way from me, Jim! you makes me tired. Don' yer know no mo' 'bout de Bible den dat? If yer don' yer better go buy some rat pizen an' kill you'self! Jim, you'se jus' no good," she added.

"But you don' stop ter refleck dat de whole place am now under my protection," said he, pompously.

"Undah your protection! How dat?"

"Wal, amn't Dick Trigger gone?"

"Ob co'se he hab. W'y?"

"An' you know dat de boss amn't to be depended upon in a 'mergency?"

"What am a 'mergency?"

"W'y—a fight wid Injuns and robbers."

"Oh, go crawl under de barn!"

"Not much!"

"Go get under de bed!"

"Oh, maybe I fine you dar—same's I did in de meat box," said he, laughing.

"Wal, I wasn't in dar lookin' fo' my knife, an' you neber caught me under de bed lookin' fo' my pistol until de fight war all ober. Now go 'way from me, Jim. I tole yer dat yer makes me tired! Go 'bout yer business an' leave me fo' ter 'tend ter mine."

Jim saw that he was not making any progress in her estimation, and so he concluded to draw out of the controversy and wait for a more favorable opportunity to impress this sable queen of the kitchen.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

PEACE and good-will reigned in Deadwood after that; for with the death of Bill Barton, the king of the gamblers, that style of people, the curse of all mining towns, gave the locality a wide berth.

More miners and their families began to arrive, and already Deadwood was talked of as a flourishing mining town, with a good prospect of becoming the foremost city in Dakota.

Mrs. Barton did not remain at Bed Rock Tavern long after the events spoken of in the preceding chapter, going away no one knew whither, but presumably to see if she could regain the title of her father's mine.

Dick Trigger and his new partuer at once set to work, and in a short time had struck it rich again. Indeed, on one particular week they took out in different shapes over five thousand dollars' worth of gold dust—one of the luckiest strikes ever made in the Black Hills.

Dick and Buck were fast becoming nabobs, although they worked hard, and were not always so successful as on that one particular week of course.

But there was one thing in which Dick was wholly successful—the winning and keeping of Julia Barmore as his promised wife, which, of course, became known to all the miners, far and near. Indeed, the majority of them saw it from the very first, and looked for no other result.

"Gosh all flapjacks, Dick, I've got an idea," said Hank Hooker one Saturday night when all the miners were gathered at the Bed Rock Tavern.

"Is that so; what is it?" asked Dick.

"Come right here an' let me murmur it inter yer hearin' apparatus, for I don't want

these chaps ter hear," and the hardy, comical little miner drew him into one corner of the bar-room.

"Now, then?" suggested Dick.

"This yer's Deadwood?"

"I think so."

"We're leadin' citizens of Deadwood, ain't we?"

"Wal, rather."

"Fust settlers?"

"Yes."

"An' we're proud of Deadwood, ain't we, Dick?" he asked, earnestly.

"Wal, somewhat."

"Do all we could for her, hey?"

"Kerect agin, pard."

"We've never had much tone 'bout ther place, have we?"

"Wal, we haven't taken on many airs yet, I b'lieve," replied Dick, laughing.

"An' it would be 'bout ther squar thing ter do something bang up, hey?"

"Of course."

"Wal, will yer do it, Dick?"

"What shall I do?"

"Dick, thar's never been a marriage in Deadwood yet!" said he, earnestly.

"That's so," mused Dick.

"Wal, yer just ther boy ter start her a-goin'. Julia's all ready, an' it'll be a big thing for yer ter be ther fust ones hitched up."

"Do you think so, Hank?"

"In course I does, an' so does several others I could name. I'll go down ter Buffalo Gap an' git a Gospil sharp an' bring him up here, an' we'll give yer ther bossiest ole send off that any man ever had in his life. Whatsay?"

"I'll think about it, Hank," replied Dick.

"But, gosh darn it, ther boys are anxious!"

"Oh, they are, eh?"

"Yes; an' besides, they want time ter get new store clothes, an' fix up for the ocasion."

"Well, I'll consult with Julia and let yer know afore long," said he, turning away to join his many friends.

"All right!" and the little man who at first hoped to capture the beautiful Julia was now fairly beside himself with joy at the prospect of her marrying his friend.

I have said that Dick and Julia were engaged, but it was only understood to be so; for, although he had received her uncle's permission to marry her, he had never yet mustered up sufficient courage to ask her plump out to become his wife.

But this proposition of Hank Hooker put

the thing in a new light; in fact, it gave him a grand opening to get in a proposition over the shoulder of his friend. So he sought her.

"Julia, gal, yer knows Hank Hooker?" he began, smiling as he spoke.

"Certainly. Is he not your friend, Dick?"

"Everlastingly an' allus! He's little, but good."

"I think so. Well?"

"Wal, now, what der yer think Hank just said to me, Julia?" blushing like a boy.

"I am sure I cannot tell. What?" she asked, looking inquiringly at him.

"Wal—he said—he said as how—wal, he said as how thar'd never been a weddin' in Deadwood yet," he finally got out.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well?" but she knew what was coming, although she kept on with her sewing.

"Wal——" here he stuck.

"Never a wedding in Deadwood! Well, it would be quite an honor to be the first ones to be married in such a promising settlement," she put in to help him along.

"That's it, gally, that's what he said, an'—an'—"

"Well, what did you say?"

"Oh, I'm a darned coyote," he said to himself, and then aloud, with all the courage he could muster, "I said yes."

"Then what did he say?" she asked, smilingly, but at the same time blushing.

"He—he—he said as how I'n—I'n—yes, that I'n you ought ter set the example."

A man may be as brave as a lion, but what a fool he is before the girl he loves.

"Indeed! Did he say that?" she asked, archly.

"Yes, he did, by gracious."

"Well, and what did you say to that?"

He was getting ten times more in love with her than ever.

"I—I said I'd consult with you."

"Did you, Dick? You great, big splendid fellow, and you have been all this while getting to the point? Why, if it had not been for Hank Hooker you might never have got to the point of proposing," said she, laughing.

"That's so. I'll go right out an' treat him," said he, starting for the bar-room.

"Wait a moment, Dick. Are you going to reward him before you know whether I agree to it or not?" she asked, laughing.

"That's so. I'm a c'yote," said he, turning back to her. "Wal, will yer have me, Julia?"

"Why, with all my heart!" said she, springing up and throwing her arms around his neck.

"Jewhitticas! but that's nice!" he said, after they had sealed the bargain. "Now, by thunder, I'll go out and treat everybody!" he exclaimed, rushing from the room.

His friends were astonished to see him come capering into the bar-room with even more delight manifested in his face and his movements than if he had found a thousand-dollar nugget.

"Boys, it's all right! Butts, whoop 'em up for everybody for the next month at my expense!" he shouted.

"What's the matter, Dick?" they asked.

"Matter! She's goin' ter have me—we're goin' ter get hitched up—we're goin' ter have our claims joined by a gospel sharp! Whoop 'em up, Butts, ole man—whoop 'em up!"

"Three cheers for ther Gamecock of Deadwood!" cried Hank Hooker, and you bet those cheers were given with a right good will.

And this was the way they celebrated the betrothal, keeping it up long and loud that Saturday night, and returning to their ranches only at the break of day, although Dick would go into the sitting-room every few minutes to see if his promised wife tasted just the same.

Well, the news of course spread all over that part of the country that Dick Trigger was going to be married the following Saturday night, and that everybody was invited to be present at the first wedding in Deadwood.

And what a wedding that was! It would be impossible to describe it, it was so unique and different from anything that is ever seen in civilized localities, but all hands went in to make it a roarer.

They danced; they nearly danced the bride to death in giving each of Dick's friends a chance to jig with her (Jumping Jim furnishing the fiddling and Hallelujah Jane joining in, as did Mrs. Butts). They got the parson drunk after the ceremony, and, altogether, it was one of those wild far Western festivals that are seen and enjoyed nowhere else.

And as morning dawns I drop the curtain.

My story is ended, but Dick Trigger remains to this day THE GAMECOCK OF DEADWOOD.

[THE END.]

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